

METAL HAMMER



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CASSYETTE - JINJER - TREVOR STRNAD - MEAT LOAF - NITA STRAUSS
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FUTURE
ISSUE 308

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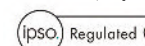
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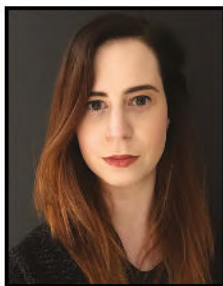
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WELL, GRAB US BY THE HOO-HAS...

...BECAUSE 2022 IS almost over! After the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, this was the year things started to feel a bit more... normal? Rescheduled tours happened (hello, Rammstein!) and festival season properly returned (hello, fields!). If going out wasn't your thing, we also had a glut of incredible albums from artists who'd postponed releases or written new material during the pandemic – you can read all about our favourites in our Top 50 (p.66).

Then there were the surprises: Eddie Munson rocked our world as the awesome new metalhead character in *Stranger Things*, we uncovered a whole scene called nu gen, and Ozzy Osbourne got back onstage in his home city of Birmingham, the very birthplace of metal.

If you're still feeling weird about, well, *stuff*, that's OK. It'll take a long time to process everything we've been through in the last few years, and it's fair to say the world's a bit... uncertain. But in our little metal corner of it, there are a bunch of things to get excited about – not least new music from Ville Valo (p.86), Download's 20th birthday (p.8) and wildcards like Las Vegas's Sick New World festival (someone get me on a plane!).

For now, I'm gonna stuff myself with advent calendar chocolate and listen to our album of the year (there's a clue at the top of this page). Thanks, as always, for being here. You're the best. From all of Team *Hammer*, have a metal Christmas!

Horns up,

E

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MEET THE BAND



LOUISE BROCK
 ART EDITOR

Stone-cold legend Louise has managed to make this issue look amazing and toilet-train a new puppy (well, that last one might need some more work). She even found time to hang out backstage with Amy Lee on Evanescence's UK tour.



ALEC CHILLINGWORTH
 WRITER

To sum up 2022, we knew we needed someone with razor-sharp insight and a sense of humour to match. Enter: Mr Chillingworth. If we're spitting out our coffee then we know he's done his job properly. You can read his feature on p.38.



DANNII LEIVERS
 WRITER

As the war in Ukraine continues, Dannii spoke to Jinjer about their year, to find out what it's like to tour the world as ambassadors for their country, and how the money they've raised is making a difference back home. See p.54.

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THE BIG PICTURE

GOOD GOLLY, IT'S DOLLY!

JUST WHEN YOU think the metal world doesn't need to give a crap about the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame, they go and invite Rob Halford to sing *Jolene* with Dolly Parton. WTF?! That was the scene at the 2022 induction ceremony in LA on November 5, with The Metal God joining Dolly – alongside Annie Lennox, Simon Le Bon, Pink and Pat Benatar, among others – to sing the country mega-hit.

Only the third out-and-out heavy metal band to be inducted into the Hall (after Metallica and Black Sabbath), Priest's own part in the night proved to be equally legendary. An introductory speech from Alice Cooper described them as "[personifying] the look and sound of heavy metal more so than any other artist," before the band accepted their Musical Excellence award. The Rock Hall inducted seven past and present bandmembers – former drummers Les Binks and the late Dave Holland; current members Halford, Scott Travis and Ian Hill; long-time guitarist Glenn Tipton, who lives with Parkinson's disease and is active with Priest when symptoms allow; and the long-estranged K.K. Downing, who left the band in 2011 blaming "an ongoing breakdown in working relationships" with the band and management.

Time apparently heals all wounds, however, as K.K. and Les rejoined the band for a three-song medley of their biggest hits – *You've Got Another Thing Comin'*, *Breaking The Law* and *Living After Midnight*. At the time of writing, there's no word on whether the ceremony was a one-off reunion with K.K. or whether we'll see him again in Priest's future. ■





THE HOT TOPIC

DOWNLOAD 2023 IS BIGGER THAN EVER

For its 20th anniversary, the festival will be four days long and feature headlining sets from Metallica, Slipknot and Bring Me The Horizon

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

“SCREAM FOR ME, Donington!” is a phrase so woven into the tapestry of heavy metal history, it might as well be the genre’s motto. But, as inconceivable as it is now, following the demise of the legendary Monsters Of Rock festival in 1996, the fields of Donington mostly lay dormant when it came to metal. There was the odd decent event, such as 2002’s one-off Ozzfest, but otherwise headbangers were hardly flocking in their thousands to mosh to the more mainstream likes of Hawkwind, the Levellers and Stereophonics.

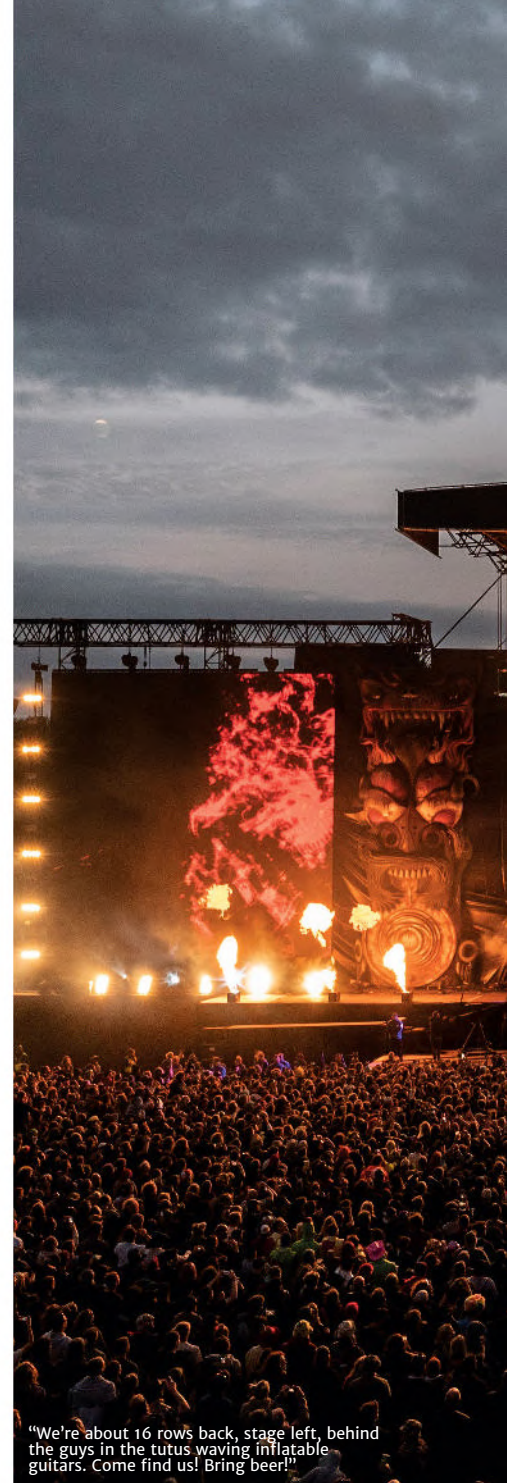
That all changed in 2003 with the inaugural Download Festival – a brand new two-day event bringing heavy metal home to the Midlands with headliners Iron Maiden and Limp Bizkit (later replaced by post-Rage Against The Machine/Soundgarden supergroup Audioslave). In the 20 years since, Download has firmly established itself as the UK’s biggest celebration of

DOWNLOAD IS GOING ALL-OUT TO CELEBRATE

all things rock and metal, expanding to three days in 2005 and welcoming hundreds of thousands of us to its hallowed grounds each year.

So with its 20th anniversary looming, Download is going all-out with a massive celebration. Now expanding to four days for the first time, the first announcement revealed a host of exciting names for the 2023 event. Of the headliners, Metallica will make their return to Donington for the first time in more than a decade to play two entirely unique sets on the Thursday and Saturday evenings. Whether that means we’ll get something akin to the massive career retrospective sets they performed at their 40th anniversary celebration in San Francisco in December 2021, or perhaps something that more directly celebrates the 40th anniversary of their legendary debut *Kill ‘Em All*, remains to be seen, but either way you can bet it’ll be a massive showing from metal’s biggest band.

Also set to make a triumphant return are masked maniacs Slipknot. Although it’s only been three years since the band last made an appearance, Slipknot’s ties to Donington have ensured that every



“We’re about 16 rows back, stage left, behind the guys in the tutus waving inflatable guitars. Come find us! Bring beer!”

headline set has been nothing short of incendiary. Experimental new album *The End, So Far* might have split opinion, but the fact it went straight to the top of the charts shows there will be plenty of love should the band debut new material over here next summer.

Download’s final headlining choice marks the first time in five years that a newer band has been elevated to that level, with Sheffield’s own Bring Me The Horizon finally getting the call-up following headlining sets at Reading & Leeds and All Points East in recent years. Though at times divisive – particularly online – Download fans have reacted positively to new blood being added to the headliner pool, with BMTH having more than proven their capability as arena headliners. Meanwhile, *Sempiternal* remains quite possibly the most impactful metalcore

KATJA OGRIN



release of the past decade, with its influence felt in the likes of While She Sleeps, Architects and beyond. With its 10th anniversary next year, there's every chance there'll be plenty of *Sempiternal* material in the set (and maybe even a few early deathcore bangers to please older fans).

With more than 60 bands already announced, next year's Download celebration looks to have a stronger focus on the contemporary landscape of rock and metal. The likes of Architects, Disturbed, Evanescence, Ghost, Within Temptation and Parkway Drive have made the jump into arenas over the past decade, promising high-production thrills in the undercard.

Elsewhere, newer bands such as Blackgold, Blind Channel, Bloodywood, Lorna Shore, Nova Twins and Pupil

Slicer are bringing the excitement with a diverse spread of styles and aesthetics, helping Download feel more representative of where rock and metal are at in 2022 (and 2023!).

With four days of music, plus many more acts to be added in due course (keep an eye on Metalhammer.com), Download 2023 truly does look like the biggest event in Donington history – a momentous celebration for the festival that breathed fresh life into not only the British summer calendar, but the metal scene as a whole. Come rain or shine – and let's face it, we've got off lightly the past couple of years – we'll see you down the front. **H**

**DOWNLOAD TAKES PLACE
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DOWNLOADFESTIVAL.CO.UK**

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing
our tiny brains

SWIFTIES DON'T LIKE M SHADOWS

The A7X singer said that selling multiple versions of an album to boost chart positions is "fan abuse". Angry Taylor Swift fans came after him. Nightmare.

SHARON OSBOURNE HAS REOPENED HER OLD FEUD WITH IRON MAIDEN...

She described Bruce Dickinson as "a fucking prick". Then she added that he's not, because "a prick's nice". Ouch.

...AND SOMEONE ELSE HAS BEEF TOO

Singer-songwriter David Crosby described Maiden as "noise". Testament's Alex Skolnick was ready to mediate, insisting "it has to be experienced live".



JOHN 5 IS IN MÖTLEY CRÜE

He's replacing guitarist and co-founder Mick Mars, who's retiring from touring due to health reasons.

SICK NEW WORLD IS THE NU METAL WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

SOAD. Korn. Deftones. Incubus. And that's just the top line of the bill in Vegas next year. We want to go so bad!

COAL CHAMBER ARE BACK (AGAIN)

As part of next year's Sick New World line-up, Coal Chamber announced they would be reuniting for the second time.

FLOOR JANSEN IS RECOVERING WELL

The Nightwish vocalist was diagnosed with breast cancer and had surgery. She shared that her "prognosis is very good". Here's to a speedy recovery.

MATT HEALY HATES METALLICA

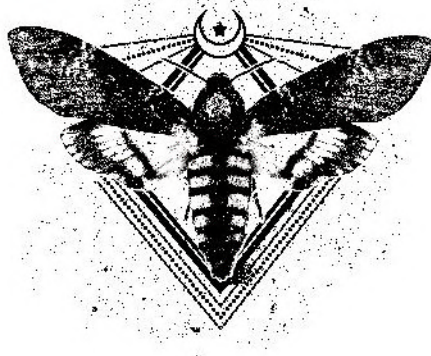
The singer of The 1975 once said he was "a big metal fan", into Converge, Refused and Glassjaw. Now he's said Metallica are his "worst band of all time". Come on...

IT'S NOT ACE TO BE HIGH

Bruce Dickinson admonished weed smokers at a recent California gig, raging, "I'm amazed you can even see."

A THRASH METAL DRUMMER HAS SUED ELON MUSK FOR \$56 BILLION

Richard Tornetta, Tesla shareholder and drummer of the now-defunct Dawn Of Correction, has filed a lawsuit against him for taking a huge pay package as CEO of Tesla.



WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN FOR ARCHITECTS TO DO A HAPPY SONG?

Architects vocalist Sam Carter is no stranger to online criticism. But can he face down your questions, or will they make him blegh to his stomach?

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: ED MASON

SAM CARTER IS one of the finest vocalists of his generation. As frontman of Architects, he's turned "blegh" into a cultural reference, and transformed pain into catharsis for legions of fans. With a No.1 album under his belt and a massive arena tour with Biffy Clyro exposing Architects to new audiences, the sky's the limit. But how will Sam fare with your questions?

Blackpool or Brighton: which seaside is more overrated, and why?

Jim Richards, Facebook

"They are two places that are really close to my heart in a weird way. My nan's from Burnley so I would go up there as a kid. Brighton is probably overrated. It's fucking busy. It's great. But Hove's better. I'm Hove 'til I die."

If you could have a real-life Pokémon, which would you have?

MaggotStitch, Twitter

"There's a Pokémon that looks like my dog. [Googles a picture on his phone and holds it up] Fennekin looks a bit like Sophia. She's a Romanian rescue dog, so she's like a million different breeds, but she genuinely looks like a fox."

How do you cure a broken spirit?

Louise Waring, Facebook

"We'll see in a year or so! You have to be able to laugh at your situation if you can. I'm not saying everybody can, but you have to be able to find light in the dark."

Ten years on, how do you view [2011 album] *The Here And Now*, and do you think you will ever properly revisit that material?

Michael Collins, Twitter

"I don't think we'll revisit it. I always thought it was alright, I just think the jump from [previous, critically lauded album] *Hollow Crown* into that was just way too much for people. I remember speaking to Tom [Searle, late Architects visionary and guitarist] before the record came out and him being like, 'I'm not into this, we shouldn't have done this.' At the time we were in a massive Pink Floyd sort of world. We really liked a lot of Coldplay records that were out at that time as well, trying to blend it with bands like Comeback Kid and Foo Fighters. You know, I listened to it the other day and was like, 'I get what [the guys] were going for.'"

Are there any songs you find too emotional to sing live?

Fran Large, Facebook

"*Memento Mori* [from 2016's *All Our Gods Have Abandoned Us*]. We always said that we would never do the full song live because it was a song that was so important to Tom. It wouldn't feel right doing it without him. It's a lot to take in, very thought-provoking."

Do you have any plans to do live shows with an orchestra, like the *Abbey Road For Those That Wish To Exist* recording?

LukeisOnFire, Twitter

"Yeah, I'd love to do that. Just being in Abbey Road was insane. I wish you could bottle all that emotion up because it was so special. We were in the room with all these insane musicians like, 'Don't fuck up, don't fuck up.' You won't see it, but we did *Black Lungs* and then I just panicked and ran out the room."

Hammer: Really?

"Yeah. I was like, 'Nope, fuck this.' I was nervous, my voice tightened up and I couldn't sing. It was the first time I'd been in a room with that many people for a long time. Then obviously there's cameras and lights in your face. It was the first time performing for a couple of years and the vocals in *Black Lungs* were terrible. I was crying my eyes out because Abbey Road is an important part of my life. I was like, 'I'm fucking this up for myself and for everybody' ▶



Architects:
Brit metal heroes

Could Architects go psychedelic?
Watch this space!

**“I FREAKED OUT,
GOT SCARED, CRIED
AND HAD A GIN”**

else.' Our manager put a gin and tonic in my hand and was like, 'Just have five minutes, you'll be fine.' You can kind of hear I'm still a bit nervous in *Black Lungs* and then as we go through the record, I feel more comfortable. I never told anyone that but yeah, I freaked out, got scared, cried, had a gin."

Your sound has evolved many times. Is there anything you still want to try but haven't had the chance?

Aimee Lynch, email

"Architects will always evolve. I've no idea where we'll take the next record. Every idea that's flying around is different to what we've done before and whatever we're doing now. We always keep it pretty dark, we won't be releasing a pop punk album any time soon. I dunno if it'd ever work, but I love Bob Dylan and The Beatles... that psychedelic world. I'd love to do something like that eventually."

Hammer: Have you ever thought about doing solo stuff?

"I'm so focused on Architects I don't ever want to be looking elsewhere. After the last record I messed around with some friends, and we started on some stuff but it's never anything serious. Who knows? In the future it could be a fun thing to do."

What needs to happen for Architects to do a happy song?

Jo Fleischer, Twitter

"Man United to start winning the league. Jeremy Corbyn to be Prime Minister. The whole world to go vegan. Complete world peace."

Was it a challenge joining a band that already existed? Did you have your own style at first, or were you trying to keep up what Architects were doing before you joined?

David Haze, Facebook

"Thanks, David. Not many people realise I wasn't in the original [line-up]. Thanks for ruining the myth! I joined on their first UK headline tour; I came onstage and sang the last song [with previous vocalist Matt Johnson] every night, so they were introducing me as being the new vocalist. I was a little shithead. I was just so full of energy. I wanted to climb and jump off shit and be annoying and in people's faces."

"WE WON'T BE RELEASING A POP PUNK ALBUM ANY TIME SOON"

Keeping an eye out for those Crossfaith lads...



Hammer: How did you develop your distinctive singing style?

"Pronunciation is a big thing. I don't want to just sound like a monster, because I'm passionate and annoyed and pissed off, but I've always wanted you to hear what I'm saying. I've also looked after my voice. I've always done warm-ups and been very strict in that I have a tea before going onstage."

Do you agree with Willow Smith that metal has been gatekept by old white men for too long?

St Eve, Twitter

"Yes. For years I wanted to wear a little bit of make-up, express myself and put on a show. But I didn't do it for ages because I was like, 'People are gonna take the piss out of me and I don't want that.' And then they did. Not only were people horrible, they were using homophobic slurs as an insult. I felt like this scene when I was growing up and when I was in school was such an inclusive scene for the outcasts. How did it become this world where it's like, 'You can't do that if you're a woman... You can't do that if you're gay'. Like, what the fuck? There's a lot of gatekeeping around artistic freedom."

Would you do another collaboration with Oli Sykes from BMTH?

Eleni 57, Twitter

"Yeah, Oli's great. He's so driven. I'd love to collaborate with him again."

Who is the maddest band you've toured with?

Sarah Hayes, Facebook

"Crossfaith. We toured with them and they were party animals. Jack Daniel's all day. They try to get you to start drinking and you're like, 'Nah, man, I'm going for a run. It's not even 5pm.' If I don't eat before I drink I'll be sick. I remember leaving venues in the van and some of Crossfaith were climbing up and dancing on the roof. They're fucking great people, but my god."

What do you think it takes for a British band to break America these days?

Derek Dolorosa, Facebook

"Sorry, Derek. You've got about 15 years' worth of touring to get that going. It's the place that's took the longest for us. We've gone there and lost so much money, but those tours are two of my favourite memories. If you wanna do it, don't give up. Just keep going."

Do we need a Warped Tour equivalent in 2023? Who would you book?

Ben Willis, email

"I don't know if we need that to come back but us, Bring Me, Turnstile, Bury Tomorrow, While She Sleeps, Heriot, Loathe... The list goes on." 

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THE SLAYLIST

AMY WALPOLE

The Witch Fever vocalist takes us through the 10 songs that turned her into a genre-bending radical

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT

"CANCER BATS WERE the first heavy band that I got into. My dad took me to a Billy Talent gig and they were supporting. My dad went up to [CB vocalist] Liam Cormier and was fangirling over *Pneumonia Hawk*. I remember being 13 and so embarrassed! We just got off tour with Cancer Bats, and I played that song with them onstage, so the whole thing is a real full-circle moment for me, and my dad was backstage watching. It was super-special.

"I first heard **Ho9909's** *Knuckle Up* when I was getting a tattoo of ivy on my arm. The tattoo was so painful because it was going over the bones in my hand, so I was focusing on that song to get through: 'Knuckle up, you're going to finish it.' I love **SUGARSTONE's** *That's Intense* because the chorus riff is just fucking sick! They're from Manchester and have a weird sound. There's an element of pop, punk and electronic going on as well as synth, but they do heavier stuff really well.

"I discovered **PUSSY RIOT's** *1312* when I was getting more into politics. That song defines a time in my life where feminism became something that was beyond me, beyond my experience, because up until around 2021, I hadn't really opened myself up to the fact that there were all these other experiences. It was a real learning curve. **DUSTIN O'HALLORAN's** *Fossils* is special to me because it's from the film *Ammonite*, a lesbian period drama I love about this woman [Mary Anning] who was a fossil hunter. She got fucked over by men because they would make her an offer and then put their name on [her discoveries] in museums.

"MY DAD FANGIRLED OVER CANCER BATS WHEN I WAS 13. I WAS SO EMBARRASSED! WE JUST TOURED WITH THEM..."

Amy's a lover of 19th-century fossil-hunters and Pussy Riot

LISTEN NOW

Head to tinyurl.com/WitchFeverSlaylist to listen to Amy Walpole's Slaylist

"NONAME is incredible. She runs a radical book club and gives free books to people who are incarcerated to politically engage them. *Rainforest* is really powerful, and I think the chorus is particularly special and quite sad: 'Everybody dies a little and I just want to dance tonight.' She writes of such pain. Her life's work is being an activist, but she shows that it's still important to have a space where you can have fun.

"Unfucktheworld was the first song of **ANGEL OLSEN's** that I heard. I was 19 or 20 and had just moved to Manchester. I was still trying to figure everything out. Angel writes so well about heartbreak. The song reminds me that it's sometimes good to let yourself wallow in your feelings for a little bit.

"I got into **BASEMENT** when I was still a teenager. I heard the acoustic version of *Yoke* first and it's my favourite version of the song. I love the melody of the lyrics, and I remember being younger and listening to it again and again, feeling sorry for myself. The first verse is 'Gasping for air, choking on my indecision / Hide me in my room and forget me,' which is so teen angst, definitely what I was feeling!

"MISERABLE is a project by King Woman's Kristina Esfandiari. We both grew up going to a charismatic church and had similar experiences within it, which is probably why I can relate to her lyrics. The lyrics of *Pain Farm* are dark and all about men being shit, as well about body types. The song itself is very dark and grungy. It kind of feels like Halloween.

"PIANOS BECOME THE TEETH have been my favourite band for so long. *I'll Get By* is probably the saddest song on *The Lack Long After*, but it's so beautiful, and it's got this really painful screaming. There's a part where the lyrics are 'I could love and drown in your goddamn smile lines / But I think I burned up watching you rallying to stay alive.' The way singer Kyle Durfey writes is like you're in the feeling with him, even if you can't personally relate to it, and that's something I'm trying to learn as a lyricist." **H**

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A LOT OF things come to mind when you think of Devin Townsend. Skulls. Puppets. Farting ballbags. The Canadian is one of metal's most unpredictable forces, but he's unfailingly polite, warm and chatty while *Hammer* attempt to extricate his life lessons. Here, Devin reflects on everything from workaholism, sobriety and mental health to what artistry means to him after 50 years on this planet.

IT'S BETTER TO KNOW YOU'RE FULL OF SHIT THAN TO PRETEND YOU'RE NOT

"A lot of my youth was spent confused about fundamental emotions: anger, sadness, grief, all these things. I had kind of a stoic upbringing – overt displays of emotion were viewed as uncouth. Then the pandemic came, and I couldn't suppress emotions in the ways that I'd been able to before. I realised, 'Wow, you haven't seen what you really are.' That allowed me to participate in a lot of things I'd repressed, whether that was anger or grief or even happiness, on a level. The good thing about that is there was a sense of honesty that came with it. By knowing, you can then deal with it."

BE WHO YOU ARE, NOT WHO YOU CREATE

"The self-image that I had created for myself prior to the pandemic was one that was easily sustainable when things were fine. You can claim yourself as being a certain way, like, 'I'm a peaceful person, I'm a calm person, I react to conflict in a balanced way.' But in a vacuum, of *course* you do. With the pandemic, I found myself thrust into scenarios that were unfamiliar to me and that tested my resolve. Through that, I recognised that I wasn't what I thought I was in a lot of ways."

IT'S OK TO BE A WORK IN PROGRESS

"I certainly am. I came off an incredibly intense creatively productive period saying, 'I need a break' and then I started building a studio. I'm trying to figure it out, but I think that my current cross to bear is being so goal-oriented. It's easy for me to rationalise the amount of productivity that I continue to do, because I do it based on [the idea that], once this is done, I'll be able to sit, I'll be able to write, I'll be able to relax. But the more I learn about myself, the more I recognise that that's the same mechanism that keeps coming back."

DON'T BECOME A MARTYR TO YOUR OWN AMBITION

"I went straight from the pandemic onto a three-month tour. I'm thinking, 'There's a lot of this I don't wanna do.' I love playing for people, but through the pandemic you stop and

go, 'Why is that important?' Fundamentally, why are we making martyrs of ourselves for something that is of no real significance in the grand scheme? With that comes a degree of having to determine how much of that is selfish versus how much of that is practical."

DOING ANYTHING TO THE EXTREME IS UNHEALTHY

"It's unfortunate that there's a certain amount of social capital that comes from being hyper-productive and never stopping. For me at



LIFE LESSONS

DEVIN TOWNSEND

The prog metal genius dives deep for pearls of wisdom on addiction, being a workaholic, and which coffee chain is most overrated

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS • PICTURES: PAUL HARRIES

least, the process of breaking away from some of those mechanisms is being OK with the decisions that I make not being as socially acceptable. If you slow down any degree of it, it results in creating content that isn't based in

"I DON'T ENJOY SUFFERING BY MY OWN HAND IF I CAN PREVENT IT"

rationalising that 'If I just stop, there's a good chance that this isn't going to continue.' So, my hyper-productivity over the past couple of years, I like to think has been to set myself up for the next things. I like to think that I'm learning, and I actually do really think I am."

KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

"When things are flashy, if you've got a stage show and lights and you're making money by telling people they should go fuck themselves, that acts as a way for others to go, 'Oh, that's acceptable. It's *clearly* acceptable, because Coke is sponsoring it, or Monster Energy is sponsoring it.' I don't think it's fundamentally bad, but I'm not a masochist. I don't enjoy suffering by my own hand if I can prevent it. When you recognise that thing that you do is causing you to suffer in ways that you clearly don't enjoy, if you continue to do it, that's on you. You forfeit the right to complain about it."

SOMETIMES YOU JUST NEED SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

"Coffee is utilitarian for me. I like it, but it's not an *enjoyable* drink. It's a practical drink for mornings. Periodically I'll stop drinking it to see how it makes me feel, but I find that my mornings don't get significantly better, and I don't have something to look forward to. So, I drink it."

NOSTALGIA DOESN'T MAKE BAD COFFEE TASTE ANY BETTER

"Canadians romanticised [Canadian coffee chain] Tim Hortons in the 90s, but it was bought by an American company in the 00s. They did it quietly because so much of their market share depended on the brand loyalty being patriotic. We were blinded by the loyalty,

'cause tasting it today, I'm like, 'Wow, this is not a delicious coffee. It's a bit like boat gas.'"

ADDICTION CAN MANIFEST IN MANY WAYS

"Working your way through addiction requires looking at the root cause much more so than the reactions. On some level, alcohol and drugs can manifest as a physical disease. But if your connection to it is much more about covering up a fundamental lack, it will migrate. It will go from work to booze to coffee to sex, to... anything. That process is a much harder one to break, because it requires looking at motives in a way that is not always comfortable."

A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE ONLY IN IT FOR THEMSELVES...

"We came through the pandemic with a sense of, 'We're all in this together,' but there's



Devin Townsend: more deep thought than *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*

“TIM HORTONS’ COFFEE TASTES LIKE BOAT GAS”

a sense of duality. ‘We’re all in this together,’ but also, ‘Stay the fuck away from me.’ It just doesn’t work. A lot of the unease comes from that, where you’re compelled to try and be cognisant of others, but also have to defend yourself. Maybe that’s the rub. Maybe that’s the thing that is so important. How do you cultivate compassion for other people when you’re afraid? I wish I had an answer.”

...BECAUSE THEY’RE AFRAID

“You’re afraid of being hurt. If you’re trying to impose boundaries in a fundamentally chaotic period, I think at least in the interim a certain degree of that can be forgiven. Of people weaponising certain things that shouldn’t be weaponised, like certain [mental health] terms, or behaviours... Maybe not even weaponising but using it as an excuse... I think that as we’re trying to find some balance in this world that we’ve now found ourselves in, there is a certain degree of latitude that can be extended. Like, ‘Now what do we do? How do we find our footing again?’ But instead, ‘This is mine, this is mine, fuck you, whatever,’ right?”

WORSE SHIT HAS HAPPENED TO BETTER PEOPLE

“This is the biggest lesson I ever learned. It’s a quote that I heard that helped me. It might have been my dad, it might have someone else, but it helped me and continues to help me whenever I start to feel hard done by, like life isn’t fair. Worse things have happened to people that are far better than I. Whenever I start going down that avenue of feeling like, ‘Why me?’ it’s easier sometimes to be like, well, why not me?”

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR JOB...

“It’s easy as someone who’s maybe insecure, to internalise the nice things people say about my music and be like, ‘That’s my identity, there. Music.’ But in absence of that, who am I? One of the hardest things I’ve had to make peace with over the last 25 years is that your music, your thoughts, your family, your work, your body, all these things are *not* your identity. Your identity is a lot more fundamental.”

...AND THAT’S OK

“At this stage in my life, I’d much rather be aware of who I am in the absence of all that stuff, than playing to that as my identity. You can lose an arm, a finger, you can no longer play guitar, can’t hear... anything can happen. If your identity is completely tied to that, that’s rough. So, the process of unlearning these things is very important, I feel.” **H**

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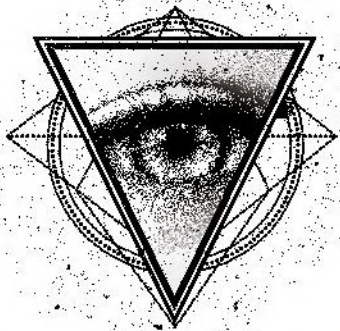
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IN THE STUDIO

AVATAR

In a bid to “save heavy metal”, Sweden’s extreme-metal circus freaks retreated into the wilderness to create their most no-frills album to date

WORDS: MATT MILLS

WHILE COUNTLESS BANDS

languished in inactivity during the pandemic, Avatar were drip-feeding the world samples of their “heavy metal’n’roll”. Eighth album *Hunter Gatherer* dropped in August 2020, and then in 2021 we received a string of standalone songs. Now, after unveiling the snarling *Valley Of Disease* single, the Swedish jesters are maintaining their momentum with *Dance Devil Dance*. Frontman Johannes Eckerström gives *Hammer* the lowdown on why they’re making “death metal that fucks”.

Last year you told *Hammer* that your runner’s high made you realise you’re the Devil incarnate. Apparently that’s inspired the new album. How so? Johannes Eckerström (vocals): “This was during the pandemic. Me and my wife half-jokingly say that dealing with isolation, all the disappointment and anger, made us come full circle on a lot of philosophical matters. We went back to being 14-year-old edgelords where the Devil had all the answers. Making *Dance Devil Dance* – the album and the song – was me trying to articulate that. Satan became an important motif.”

So is this a concept album?

“You always end up with an album that’s more conceptual than you meant it to be, because it’s all written within a certain period of your life. There’s definitely the vibe of a big party at the end of the world; a ‘going out with a bang’ feel. I’m more angry than I’ve been

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
9

STUDIO:
Johannes Eckerström’s family home, Hova, Sweden

PRODUCER:
Jay Ruston

EXPECT:
No-nonsense melodic death metal jams you can dance and fuck to



Johannes will never
(a) drown kittens or
(b) be a fascist

before. One song says, ‘No one gets to be a fucking fascist.’ We haven’t bothered getting too political prior to this, but saying that shouldn’t be political; it should be the baseline. Don’t drown kittens and don’t be a fascist.”

Why the title *Dance Devil Dance*?

“The ‘Devil’ part celebrates all the archetypes, symbols and spirituality of darker things that pulled us into metal to begin with. ‘Dance’ is the important half: it became important for us to treat heavy metal like dance music. There are no techno beats, but we wanted to focus on what heavy metal should be: a subgenre of rock’n’roll that’s supposed to get people to move.”

You’ve said that you want to “save heavy metal” with this album...

“I mean, we don’t need to save Megadeth! The masters will continue to be the masters, but what’s going on now is too intellectual. It’s castrated. It’s too brainy, with not enough dancing. There aren’t enough speeding tickets gathered to this music. Where are the Judas Priests and Motörheads that don’t sound like sloppy seconds?”

So will this be the most concise and energetic Avatar album?

“Yes, 100%. I know that we have made an album that

fucks. [In metal] you can either do violent songs about fucking or fucking songs about violence, and we’ve done the latter.”

Is *Valley Of Disease* a good representation of the album?

“It’s on the heavier end. A couple of songs go deeper into death metal but, again, it’s death metal that fucks. Remember old-school death metal, when it sounded like they’d murdered someone? We’re bringing that in, along with our rock’n’roll and melodic side.”

Why did you record this in your family’s summer house in the middle of nowhere?

“We wanted to create a lo-fi environment where we couldn’t over-polish things. We didn’t want to be in LA again. We wanted grit, pressure, filth and dirt under your fingernails.”

What do you want *Dance Devil Dance* to achieve for Avatar?

“I want to become a multi-platinum-seller and the first billionaire to come out of metal this side of the millennium. You’ve heard a million bands say, ‘This is the best album we’ve ever done,’ but this is the best album we’ve ever done – ha ha!”

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THE STORY BEHIND

I MISS THE MISERY HALESTORM

Inspired by divorce and toxic relationships, *I Miss The Misery* became the enduring, empowering anthem that cemented Halestorm as future stars

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

IN 2011, HALESTORM were still young guns on the scene. Two years prior, the Pennsylvania rockers had emerged from playing local malls, marking themselves out as an exciting new noise with their self-titled debut. But it was their second album, 2012's snarling *The Strange Case Of...* that would prove to be their turning point. The record that introduced the masses to their bombastic hard rock, it contained their most career-defining songs, the sound of a band running wild and free, coming into their own and testing their own limits. The quartet would start the album's cycle as hungry upstarts and emerge as Grammy-winning, festival field-filling ass kickers.

"With that whole record, I feel like we crossed over into not proving that we deserve to be here, but proving that we deserve to stay here," remembers vocalist and guitarist Lzzy Hale. "As time goes on, you know more about the inner workings of everything, and it becomes a little less magical. Whereas that was our purgatory: it was the second record, everything was still super-new."

She describes the album's recording sessions that took place at multiple studios in Los Angeles and during

which the band moved into a house in the coastal community of Marina del Rey as a sort of summer camp.

"I never went to college, and my replacement for that was this second record," she continues. "We would meet complete strangers, become best friends and go over and stay at their house until 4am. The four of us are close anyway, but this was like a household. The parents aren't around so it's the four of us like, 'OK, who's going out to get groceries today? Do we have enough beer?' Priorities!"

Initially, the album's breakout song was thunderous first single *Love Bites (So Do I)*, which, to the band's amazement, beat out Iron Maiden, Lamb Of God and Megadeth to bag the Grammy for Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance in 2013 – their shock evident as they stumbled down to the podium, reading an acceptance speech hurriedly typed out on drummer Arejay Hale's phone. Over time though, another track has firmly supplanted it as the record's defining moment.

The larynx-shattering *I Miss The Misery* had been one of the tracks they'd started testing live before the album was released, and on seeing how the crowd reacted to its incendiary chorus, they decided to release it as its second

single. Ten years on, it's become their most enduring song, a fan favourite that currently stands at 86 million views on YouTube, dwarfing the 28 million views of its award-winning predecessor. Belting out of the blocks with a banshee scream from Lzzy: 'OOOOOOH! *I miss the misery!*' the track immediately put the band's greatest asset – her gale-force vocals – upfront.

"It was such a whim to start it that way. Originally we were going to start it with the riff and then we said, 'Let's do it in a different way, let's start with the voice,'" she recalls. "And now 10 years later, that's kind of become my thing."

The song is the kind of balls-to-the-wall sonic assault we now expect from Halestorm: mountainous riffs, a huge chorus and raspy, life-affirming vocals all reflecting an escalating confidence that ripples throughout the album at large, but it's Lzzy's growing assurance as a vocalist that shines through. Certainly, it impressed bands like Black Stone Cherry and Shinedown, who asked her to lend her pipes on the duets *Peace Is Free* and *Breaking Inside* around that time.

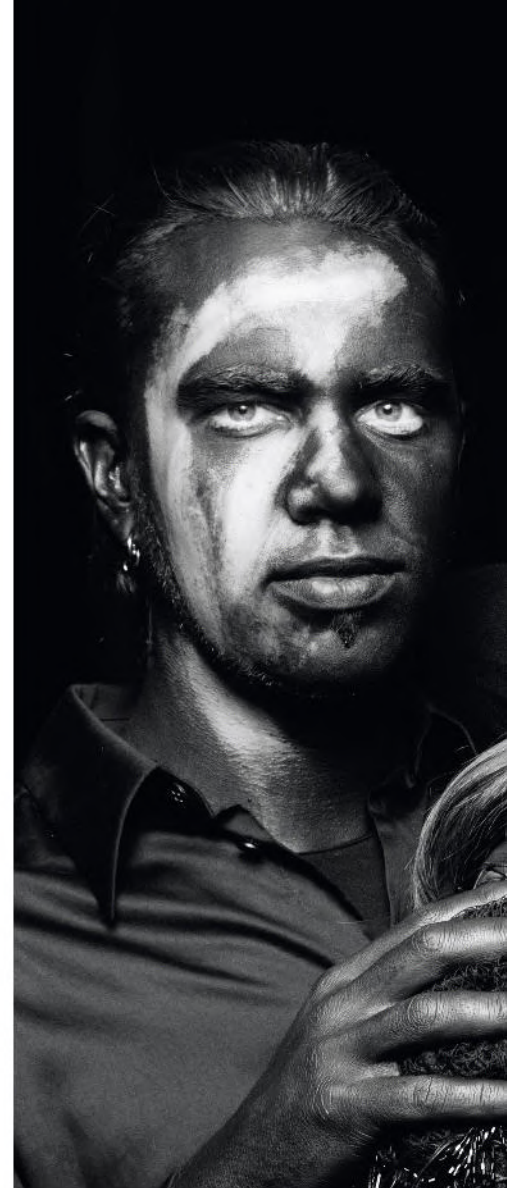
"I was definitely pushing vocally, versus the first album," says Lzzy, who says she "came into her own as a vocalist" during *The Strange Case Of...*

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2012

PERSONNEL:
Lzzy Hale
(vocals, guitar),
Arejay Hale
(drums),
Joe Hottinger
(guitar),
Josh Smith
(bass, keyboards)

HIGHEST CHART
POSITION:
49 (UK)



Halestorm (left to right):
Joe Hottinger, Lzzy Hale,
Josh Smith, Arejay Hale



recording sessions. “We’d been touring a lot, we were doing 11 days in a row at one point, so I really got to know where my limitations were and where they weren’t.”

It was producer Howard Benson (Motörhead, Sepultura, My Chemical Romance) who challenged her to go one step further with each vocal take.

“He’d say, ‘Nope, I think you can sing higher than that,’” she laughs. “That was a huge confidence builder for me with my vocals because I started to not only expand my range, but find that control and that attitude that goes with it. It really laid the ground for literally everything I do vocally now.”

I Miss The Misery was also the moment Lzzy established herself as a true force of a nature, a figurehead whose confessional, resilient lyrics would be adopted by fans as emotional armour. It was written during a period of turmoil for the Hales – while the band partied and recorded in LA, back home in Pennsylvania, Lzzy and Arejay’s parents were in the midst of a divorce.

“I remember having a conversation with my mom about my dad,” says Lzzy. “They had been together for so long, the basis for [the] relationship is the arguments and the fights and the disagreements. That turned into, I don’t miss you, I actually miss the misery. I thought that was hilarious. I think it was my way of turning something that was negative into something positive.”

For Lzzy, the song also had a deeper, personal meaning, chronicling her break from a past toxic relationship.

“A guy cheated on me a couple of times and I swore I’d never go back,”

**“IT TURNED
SOMETHING
NEGATIVE INTO
SOMETHING
POSITIVE”**

she recalls. “There was that pull to go back and I never did, but I remember that feeling. It’s almost like you’re being a masochist in some way, it’s comfortable to live in those feelings.”

She considers *I Miss The Misery* to be her first anthem of empowerment, something that has since become her calling card. “I discovered I have this ability to write a song about how something sucks and try to maintain that hope or that attitude and control.”

One particular lyric, which was intended to force people outside their comfort zone, really ruffled feathers at the time: ‘*I miss the rough sex/ Leaves me a mess.*’

“2012 wasn’t that long ago but it was in terms of women and evolution,” she says, noting that just 10 years ago a woman owning her desire and sexuality was considered “taboo”. “That almost made me want to double down on that kind of stuff too. By the time we made our fourth album, I’m talking about ‘do not disturb’ and threesomes and really getting people red in the face but to me, it’s fun.” ▶

Female empowerment and a killer song. What's not to love?



“IN A LOT OF ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS, THE HARDEST THING IS TO BREAK AWAY”

Building an open and frank relationship with the fans has been incredibly rewarding for Lzzy.

“I’ve had parents tell me that they hope their girls are as sexually confident as I am when they grow up,” she reveals. “That wasn’t something I expected. I expected to get angry parent letters – it’s been the opposite.”

Ten years after the song’s initial release, following #metoo and in light of increasingly transparent conversations around abuse in the music industry, she recognises that the meaning of the song has evolved for some fans.

“It’s really beautiful how people can take this song with me being a little tongue in cheek, and actually find that deeper meaning in it. Somewhere where I wasn’t even looking,” she says. “I know that song has helped so many people get over so many of those types of relationships, move on and find some type of superpower within themselves to walk away. In a lot of abusive relationships, the hardest thing is to break away from it. That song has helped break that stigma a little bit, or at least helped someone say, ‘This is the final straw and it’s OK if I miss it, but I’m not going back.’”

The Strange Case Of... was released on April 10, 2012 and changed the band’s lives. Armed with an arsenal of new anthems that were resonating with the fans, Halestorm headed into the 2012 summer festival season and found themselves being bumped higher and higher up the bills. But more importantly, the album would secure the band an identity and longevity they’ve built on ever since. And while *Love Bites (So Do I)* won the Grammy, and the album’s third single, *Freak Like Me*, released in January 2013, was the band’s first single to reach No.1 on Billboard’s Mainstream Rock Chart, *I Miss The Misery* has proven to be the track with the most staying power.

“I feel like the people have spoken and so it’s almost more rewarding for us than *Love Bites* and the Grammy,” considers Lzzy. “If you had told me, even in 2012, that I’d be standing onstage today encouraging young people to own their weird, to empower young women... that song was the groundwork for us being able to say that is what we do, and that is what people see when they look at me. It’s such a beautiful thing.” **H**

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HALESTORM’S UK TOUR WITH ALTER BRIDGE AND MAMMOTH WVH STARTS DECEMBER 5

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PUNHEAD

I loved the Hellraiser feature [*Hammer* 367]. In the mid-90s, I used to go to Jilly's Rockworld and The Ritz rock nights in Manchester. On Halloween, I always saw someone in a very authentic Pinhead costume (disclaimer: my recollection could have been hazy...), who was always in character when you spoke to them, and raised a massive cheer by standing on the drum riser on stage in a 'Jesus Christ Pose'. Given that Doug Bradley apparently lives near Manchester, I like to think it was actually him giving one of the costumes an airing! I'd love to know if it was. If not, then I don't want to know as the disappointment would tear my soul apart... well, I'd be a bit disappointed anyway.

Andy McLarnon, email

We like to think it was Doug on those hallowed Halloween nights, Andy – he certainly has a history of being very metal friendly.

Amy Lee and Jonathan Davis: we have so much love for these two!



TIK THE BOXES

I enjoyed the TikTok feature in the latest *Hammer*. It's an interesting platform and metal seems perfect for it in terms of getting bands – especially those with striking visuals – out to bigger audiences. I still remember cassettes, so older bands complaining about it just makes me think of people being upset about CDs. Get on TikTok, you crusty fuckers – adapt or die!

Naomi Butcher, email

Absolutely, Naomi. Seeing the success of bands like Ghost really does hammer home how good those platforms are at engaging new – and younger – audiences.

MAYNARD JAMES MEAN-MAN

Maynard James Keenan's band started three decades ago and have no need to begin to try to reach an audience and establish themselves. Lovely, intelligent guy, but he can't

relate to bands who have to use TikTok. Plus bands barely make money from music now and venues are screwing them in takings...

SpiritWalkTalk, Twitter

MJK has never shied away from sharing his opinions, but we agree that his comments were a bit out of touch. Bring back cave paintings, we say.

NO PLACE TO HIDE

Love how I just saw the Korn/Evanescence issue and *Bring Me To Life* came on the radio. I saw Korn and Evanescence in September and it was an amazing concert.

Ashley Mitchell, Facebook

All part of our master plan, Ashley. We hope you're enjoying Stephen Hill's excellent feature!

A DIVISIVE DECISION

Disturbed just released their best album in nearly 20 years and you get Korn and Evanescence on the

#TWEETS

My gender is saying "just when I thought I was out they pull me back in" like the dude from the Sopranos
Ashanti Mutinta, Backxwash (@backxwash)

Black Panther 2 soundtrack went hard
Pupil Slicer (@PupilSlicer)

If he had lived, he would have crucified us all
Nick Holmes, Paradise Lost/Bloodbath (@NickHolmesPL)

Listen, I made a career off of embarrassing men, I cannot be stopped
Scene Queen (@scenequeenrocks)

Saw @ArchitectsUK for the first time last night. Utterly amazing
Gail Porter (@Gailporter)

I joined Mastodon. Note to music press: That does NOT mean what it sounds like
Alex Skolnick, Testament (@AlexSkolnick)



Blackbraid: Jon Krieger is embracing his Native American heritage

cover?! Come on guys, if you're gonna do nu metal, do it properly.

Stu Eccles, email

Sadly we couldn't make it work with David Draiman's gang this time, but as they're doing Download next summer, there's every chance you'll see them before long. Besides, when it comes to nu metal all-stars, is there a bigger team-up than Amy Lee and JD? We don't think so.

BOGGED DOWN

I only read *Hammer* when on the bog, so yet to read the Jonathan Davis/ Amy Lee feature. Any chance of including a crossword in future?

Peter Duncan, Facebook

Your suggestion has been duly noted. Wash your hands when you're done.

NOTHING KORNLY ABOUT IT

Call it corny, but Evanescence and Korn were two of the most important bands in the world to me as a teenager

and got me through so many tough times. It was so lovely reading them in conversation with each other in the new *Hammer*, especially because there's a clear mutual respect there. More of this in metal!

Aimee Billings, email

Thanks, Aimee – and we assure you, you're not alone in how important those bands were to you. That's a big part of why we wanted to get Amy and JD together in the first place!

THE SECRET OF NAHM

First read about Blackbraid on the site a few weeks back, so really happy to see them pop up in the mag proper. If there's more Native American heavy metal out there, I'd love to know.

Jason Mark, email

Glad you liked it, Jason! There's clearly a lot of appetite for metal stories from further afield than our own backyard, so if we hear about it, we'll share it with you!

THE BIG DEBATE

A new study reveals what your favourite genre of music says about your personality, describing metalheads as “gentle” and “creative” with “low self-esteem”. You lot had something to say about this.

WE SAID

“The study claims ‘rock and heavy metal often project images of anger, bravado, and aggression’, but adds that in spite of their aggressive music tastes, as people, they’re rather different.”

YOU SAY

Older metalhead here. I've always been loud and obnoxious, zero creativity and egotistical as hell. Proud of all my traits! Maybe this study is about the younger gen? 'Cause we older metalheads freakin' rule!

WilOrWill, Twitter

In my last year of high school, a new girl was added to my class. She instantly came over to me to make friends. She told me she had a metalhead friend in her last school and they told her if she felt lost to go to a metalhead and he/ she will take care of her, which is exactly what I did. I just picked her up on my way like I'd pick up a stray cat.

Kimmy Cat, Facebook

I prefer to think of myself as a moody eccentric, but this isn't too far off.

CrHoaglund, Twitter

Depends on the country/community. No offence, but in the US slightly more rednecks listen to rock and metal, while in Europe it's more people pushed to the edge of society.

Alex Fazekas, Facebook

Low self esteem, my balls! We are a pretty gentle bunch if there isn't a moshpit going though, so that part's good.

John Carr, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/ GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers



VV

Neon Noir

“Him is dead. The period of mourning is over. Long live VV”

ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR



ELDER

Innate Passage

“Lush, kaleidoscopic prog/psych to reawaken your sense of wonder”

JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR



THE OTOLITH

Folium Limina

“Same choice as last month. I'm still hopelessly lost in their beautiful world”

VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



VV

Neon Noir

“That Heart(agram)-shaped hole is finally being refilled”

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

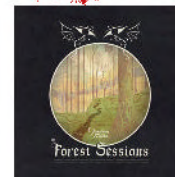


KAOTEON

Neither God Nor Master

“A new epoch, but the same indefatigable spirit from the Lebanese extreme metal heroes”

RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER



JONATHAN HULTÉN

The Forest Sessions

“Ex-Tribulation man wanders through the trees as he reimagines his debut solo album”

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR



NEW NOISE

THE OTOLITH

Former members of SubRosa embark on a symphonic doom odyssey into the worlds beyond

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY

“I’M VERY INTERESTED in liminal states of being,” says The Otolith’s lead vocalist and violinist, Sarah Pendleton, as she discusses the inspiration behind the title of the band’s debut album, *Folium Limina*. “Where you’re in between two states for a few minutes or maybe a few seconds. Like the transition between sleep and awake, sobriety and euphoria, or even between life and death. It’s a place where anything can happen.”

If you’re looking for music to alter your state of mind, The Otolith’s intoxicating and experimental blend of doom and post-rock that’s punctuated by violins and multiple vocals may be just what you’re after. Named after a structure in the inner ears of certain animals that helps them to sense motion, sound and balance, The Otolith was formed by former members of SubRosa, the experimental Salt Lake City-based collective who split in 2019. Anyone who was a fan of SubRosa’s violin-tinged heaviness will find plenty to love in the sounds of The Otolith, but this new band also stands firmly on its own.

“It’s really rare to find that kind of chemistry,” Sarah says, explaining that when SubRosa split, many of the bandmembers continued to jam together, wanting to hold on to the

special connection that they had. “We knew we couldn’t live without making music with each other. The communication is almost non-verbal; it’s a huge gift.”

In 2020, The Otolith (completed by Kim Cordray on violin and vocals, Levi Hanna on guitar and vocals, Andy Patterson on drums and percussion and Matt Brotherton on bass and vocals) were asked to contribute to the Women Of Doom compilation on Blues Funeral Recordings, which also included tracks by Deathbell, Frayle and Mlny Parsonz (of Royal Thunder).

“That gave us a solid goal to come up with a song,” Sarah says. The result was the mesmeric track *Bone Dust*, the first song they wrote together as a band, which would later end up on their debut album. “We’re so conscious of the fact that there will be comparisons made [with SubRosa],” Sarah says. “And we understand that, and that’s OK, because we spent so many years building that and working on that. We want to prove ourselves as The Otolith, but we also recognise how lucky we are to be able to stand on the shoulders of the work that we did.”

In making The Otolith’s debut album *Folium Limina*, Sarah explains that it was a wholly collaborative approach – any member of the band could bring a song to the table, and everyone could

IN SHORT SOUNDS LIKE:

Expansive, experimental post-metal/doom to take you on a trip

FOR FANS OF: SubRosa, Cult Of Luna, My Dying Bride

LISTEN TO: *Bone Dust*



The Otolith want to take you on a journey

write lyrics. “So what we’ve ended up with is a grouping of songs that are about different things, and the writing process for each song might be completely different,” she says.

The six tracks on the album – all of them surpassing the nine-minute mark – take the listener on different sonic and thematic journeys. The pummelling *Andromeda’s Wing* follows the journey of a sleepwalker who moves through the countryside at night and encounters aliens, while the hypnotic post-rock of *Ekpyrotic* is about the individual power that every human has that can be stamped out by modern distractions. The mesmeric opener, *Sing No Coda*, is about the isolation and loneliness that Sarah felt during and after 2020.

“There was this sort of strange hypochondria that settled over me,”

PRESS



Sarah explains. "I was missing my friends so much that it hurt, and there was nothing you could do to stop the disintegration of those relationships."

After the events of 2020, these are likely feelings that everyone can relate to. Sarah agrees. "All of us," she says. "The whole planet. And anything that can unite humans, to me, is a good thing. I am so, so tired of the divisions and the lines between us."

This message of unity is also clear in the track *Bone Dust*, which has been expanded from its original version for the album with the addition of Charlie Chaplin's final, extraordinary speech from the 1940 film *The Great Dictator*. The film parodied Hitler, fascism and the Nazis as World War II raged, and even now, more than 80 years on from its release, the message of this powerful monologue still resonates.

"WE KNEW WE COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT MAKING MUSIC WITH EACH OTHER"

"Andy [Patterson] had us listen to the speech," says Sarah of the scene in which Chaplin impersonates a dictator named Adenoid Hynkel, but without the leader's hatred. "It fits so well with our worldview. He is talking about how he doesn't want to be in a position of power, he doesn't want to be a dictator, he doesn't want to rule people. He says, 'You don't hate, only the unloved hate,' and I think that's

a really good point. I adore Charlie Chaplin because I think making people laugh is a sacred business. But he was also so much more than that."

Another theme that connects the songs on *Folium Limina* is the drive to keep moving, keep creating, even when times are rough, to find catharsis. Sarah mentions the Latin phrase 'Ad astra per aspera' that translates to 'Through hardships to the stars.' "As you get older, and you realise how limited your time is, not knowing how much time you have left to have adventures – like playing shows around the world – there's this sense of urgency," she explains. A sense of: 'Let's make the most of this time we have...'" ■

FOLIUM LIMINA IS OUT NOW VIA BLUES FUNERAL RECORDINGS

NEW NOISE

SHE MUST BURN

Deathcore brutes find new lease of life with symphonic extremity

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE • PICTURES: MARCUS MASCHWITZ



IMAGINE YOU'RE WATCHING

The Phantom Of The Opera, but the theatre is up in flames. That's what it feels like to consume the stunning horror of She Must Burn's latest album *Umbra Mortis*. After a huge line-up overhaul, the deathcore outfit have evolved into something far more symphonic, and the results are formidable.

"The new line-up has allowed us to realise the vision," bassist Frankie Keating tells us. "Listening back over the new record, it's obvious that this is the band we're supposed to be. We've expanded our musical range and our textural diversity. And with Valis being a classically trained singer, that's opened so many doors for us."

New vocalist Valis Volkova is a vampiric visionary. Serving up vocals drenched in theatricality, she has truly blackened the outfit's already rumbling ferocity. "I feel like I've brought more of a symphonic black metal edge by adding in a mixture of classical and pop-rock vocals," Valis explains. "I have a pet peeve when it

comes to synthetic choirs on record, so there's none of that. It's all real. The previous vocalist was more pop-focused vocally, and I think my abilities have enhanced our sound."

Umbra Mortis is a patchwork of howling breakdowns and gorgeous splendour. Tracks like *Of Blood And Bone* highlight the outfit's interweaving of light and dark perfectly; gruesome, venom-soaked grumbles clash with operatic cries, the layered vocals spellbinding and transfixing. Yet nothing highlights the band's evolution quite like the track *Souls Asunder*. The epitome of a tormented black metal waltz, it's the embodiment of a venomous, twisted fairytale.

"It's a literal Beauty and the Beast story," Frankie notes. "At our upcoming shows we want to create an immersive experience, and it'd be amazing to replicate the track's candlelit, vampire mansion atmosphere onstage." ■

UMBRA MORTIS IS OUT NOW VIA GREY ROCK RECORDS

IN SHORT
SOUNDS LIKE:

Operatic deathcore rammed with bludgeoning breakdowns, razor-sharp riffs and haunting classical movements

FOR FANS OF:

Cradle Of Filth, Make Them Suffer, Lorna Shore

LISTEN TO:

Souls Asunder

KĚKHT ARĀKH

The Ukrainian mastermind bringing romance to black metal

WORDS: SPENCER GRADY • PICTURES: VASYL MAIDYBOR

"AS A BLACK metal listener, I always felt there were elements of the music I wanted to exclude, but also that there was something lacking, something I needed," says Dmitry Marchenko, aka Crying Orc, the Ukrainian mastermind behind Këkht Arākh.

Even prior to launching the project in 2018, Dmitry felt bound to contravene the conventions of extreme metal, relegating black metal's old manifestos of evil and scorn to let new love shine through. This audacious approach required an equally intrepid tonal palette, incorporating everything from the gnostic neo-folk whimsies of Current 93 to the ethereal cloud-rap of Bladee, making their impact felt on 2018's *Night & Love* and last year's beautifully melancholic *Pale Swordsman*.

While owing much to early Nordic antecedents, both albums draw their enhanced passions from a wellspring of tender tranquillity, as dulcet piano and acoustic guitar arpeggios pierce the prevailing frenzy. Tracks such as *Forever Night Castle Of Love* and *Swordsman* go further still, eschewing metal completely and coming on like a yearning Goethe penning purest heart-balms of gothic emo.

Dmitry's romantic proclivities have seen plenty of kvlt purists lining up to accuse Këkht Arākh of heresy. But, regarding these naysayers, he remains resolute and philosophical. "Many in black metal seem obsessed with becoming more aggressive, more evil, more extreme than before," he explains. "But such attitudes leave no room for the soft or sentimental. So, yes, I can see why people might reject or even hate my stuff, it's totally reasonable. It's just a matter of taste, after all." ■

NIGHT & LOVE AND PALE SWORDSMAN ARE OUT NOW VIA SACRED BONES

IN SHORT
SOUNDS LIKE:

Second-wave BM mutations with piano-led interludes, providing sustenance for hopeless romantics and spurned lovers

FOR FANS OF:

Darkthrone, Aäkon Këëtrëh, Grausamkeit

LISTEN TO:

Thorns

GAUPA

Swedish stoner rockers reconnect with nature via psychedelia

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

An inter-dimensional foray into an otherworldly woodland

FOR FANS OF:

Elder, Maidavale, Opeth

LISTEN TO:

Mammon

FORMED IN 2017, Gaupa – which translates as ‘lynx’ in English – consider the mountainous landscapes of their homeland in Falun, Sweden as something of a muse. “Our music is about getting back to nature. Animals are psychedelic,” says frontwoman Emma Näslund, who resembles an enchanting, heavy metal Björk.

The psychedelic stoner rockers released their debut album *Feberdröm* in 2020, and soon signed to Nuclear Blast, a label that was already very much on their radar. “Meshuggah and Opeth, who have both [previously] been with Nuclear Blast, are big influences,” Emma says.

The album’s forthcoming successor, *Myriad*, sees a melting pot of stoner rock, folk and psychedelia come together in a cosmic dance, syphoning



the sprawling progressiveness of Elder, the pensiveness of Radiohead and the riff-heavy fire of experimental country-fellows Maidavale. Boldly running through each track are also Näslund’s captivatingly surrealist lyrics, derived from “classical, poetry and fantasy books”.

Currently, the band’s live shows are built around transfixing animations projected onto backdrops as they play,

some of which include “spaceships landing on moons” and “octopuses wearing boxing gloves”. But where their plans for the future are concerned, it’s anybody’s guess.

“I’d like to live in a lighthouse,” Emma airily offers, ever the unfathomable mystery. **H**

MYRIAD IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST



I AM

Extreme metal Texans use sword and sorcery to tell stories of self-betterment

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: KEVYN REECE

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:

Death, thrash and doom metal all smashed into one groove-powered package

FOR FANS OF:

Sylosis, Power Trip, Asphyx

LISTEN TO:

The Iron Gate

“YOU LISTEN TO some records and think: ‘I just listened to the same song 10 times,’” says I Am frontman Andrew Hileman. “I take a lot of pride in the fact that we’re a creative band. No two I Am songs sound the same.”

The Texans find inspiration in every corner of the extreme metal world on new album *Eternal Steel*. Opener *The Primal Wave* is a thrash metal assault, while *Heaven On Earth* uses a doom melody to decimate hope and *Price Of Pain* channels fellow Texans Pantera with its roars and stomping drums.

Andrew co-founded I Am while in school, and it’s his self-betterment that’s the cornerstone of *Eternal Steel*’s

lyrics. The songs aren’t just sword and sorcery stories, they’re about his drive to be a happier, more confident person. “*The Iron Gate* is about going to uncomfortable places, because that’s where you grow as a person,” Andrew explains. “I perform better under pressure. I wanted to lyrically create a place that channels that discomfort.”

He continues: “I want *Eternal Steel* to become a legendary album. I want it to be that album that you think about 30 years from now, like: ‘Damn, that album was really good!’” **H**

ETERNAL STEEL IS OUT NOW VIA MNRK HEAVY

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to



LOST SOCIETY

“LOST SOCIETY SUPPORTED us on our headline tour, and they’re Finnish. We think they have the most potential breakthrough as a breakthrough band – after us! But they’re amazing. I think the scene is just waiting for them to blow up.”

JOEL HOKKA,
BLIND CHANNEL



HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month



DEICIDE THE ROADRUNNER YEARS

RHINO / RUN OUT GROOVE

£200

IT WOULD BE impossible to overstate Deicide's importance to death metal's formative years. Manifestly more evil and more brutal than everybody else, they took great delight in shoving Satan down our throats from their self-titled debut onwards. This lavish, nine-disc box set presents the band's entire Roadrunner catalogue on wax, including three albums that have never been on vinyl before, and the classic demo *Amon: Feasting The Beast*. Deicide's first four records are all certified classics. With ageless anthems like *Sacrificial Suicide* and *Dead By Dawn*, 1990's *Deicide* remains one of death metal's infernal crown jewels, and both the fast-as-fuck *Legion* and the anthem-packed *Once Upon The Cross* still wield great power. The remaining albums are perhaps less consistent, but Deicide never lost their furious intensity, and double live set *When Satan Lives* captures it perfectly. A giant poster and some sweet Deicide stickers complete the set. Hail Satan.

tinyurl.com/deicide-box



BAPHOMET TOWEL

£44.99

Take the horned one to the beach, or if you're feeling fiendish, the crack of doom. Shaped like a coffin and suitably Satanic in colour, drying yourself devilishly betwixt these half-cotton, half-polyester fibres will cost you slightly less than a Faustian bargain.

tinyurl.com/satanic-towel



TYPE O NEGATIVE CBD

£63

Hey, it's classier than a plaster cast of Pete Steele's cock. Just about. Type O's limited gothy tincture is blood-red, blackberry flavoured, and packs 100 milligrams of CBD per serving. Dose up and zone out.

tinyurl.com/typeo-cbd



THE SHINING CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS

£15.80

"Come sleigh with us, Santa. Forever and ever..." is something you might say if you were these fucking terrifying Christmas ornaments. Hand-painted and crafted from resin, give your Yuletide decorations a little Shine this year.

tinyurl.com/xmas-shining


SODOM BOX SET
£67.99

If you like German thrash, you might be sick of it after this. This re-recorded best-of box set is spread across two blue/clear records, two CDs and a cassette, and also contains a signed postcard, LP-sized book, two posters, sticker and more.

tinyurl.com/sodom-boxset


SYLVAINE TEA
£8.40/£16.80

What better way to sink into the ethereal soundscapes of Sylvaine than with a nice cup of tea? This signature blend combines Ceylon and gunpowder tea, with a fittingly naturalistic mix of apple, cinnamon, rose petals and marigold flowers.

tinyurl.com/sylvaine-tea


BABY MERMAID SKELETON
£137

Supernature is a cruel mistress and sadly not all newly hatched mermaids make it to either the open sea or shallow coastline waters where lonely yet kindly fishermen await. Nevertheless, this is perfect for either your travelling freakshow or living room cabinet.

tinyurl.com/mermaid-bones


WITCH FEVER TOTE BAG
£13

Witch Fever's debut album, *Congregation*, rips harder than Matt Pike's bong during an *Ancient Aliens* TV marathon. Waste no time and represent proper doom punk from the north with this classy, heavyweight tote bag.

tinyurl.com/witches-tote


GHOST JEAN JACKET
£73.99/£78.99

Perhaps the epitome of 'business in front, party in the back', this epic jacket lulls you into a false sense of security with its low-key frontal logo before dazzling your eyes and mind with its flashy big Papa backprint.

tinyurl.com/ghost-denim


OCEANS T-SHIRT
£19

Expansive and inventive genre-manglers Oceans have returned with their second album, the cheerily-titled *Hell Is Where The Heart Is*. Why not make a sartorial splash and mark the occasion with this artful t-shirt?

tinyurl.com/oceans-tee


SKULL BACKPACK
£33.72

Make a statement at ghoulish school, the graveyard shift at work or Asda with this immensely cool backpack. Sturdy and handstitched, nothing'll be falling out of it anytime soon – unlike your own much-abused brainbox.

tinyurl.com/skull-backpack


VHS HORROR T-SHIRT
£28.99

This cotton tee from Blackcraft Cult impels you to pursue two simple, noble aims: to worship the Devil and pop a VHS tape in the slot to watch your old Hammer Horror collection or whatever wrongness you have on tape. The Christian right will LOVE you for this one.

tinyurl.com/vhs-horror


LORD OF THE RINGS BAUBLES
£17.99

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, a fine, gold-en ring. It's vintage and everything – artisanally crafted at Mount Doom, and even inscribed with fancy Elven script. It also came with these lovely baubles – aren't they precious?

tinyurl.com/lotr-baubles

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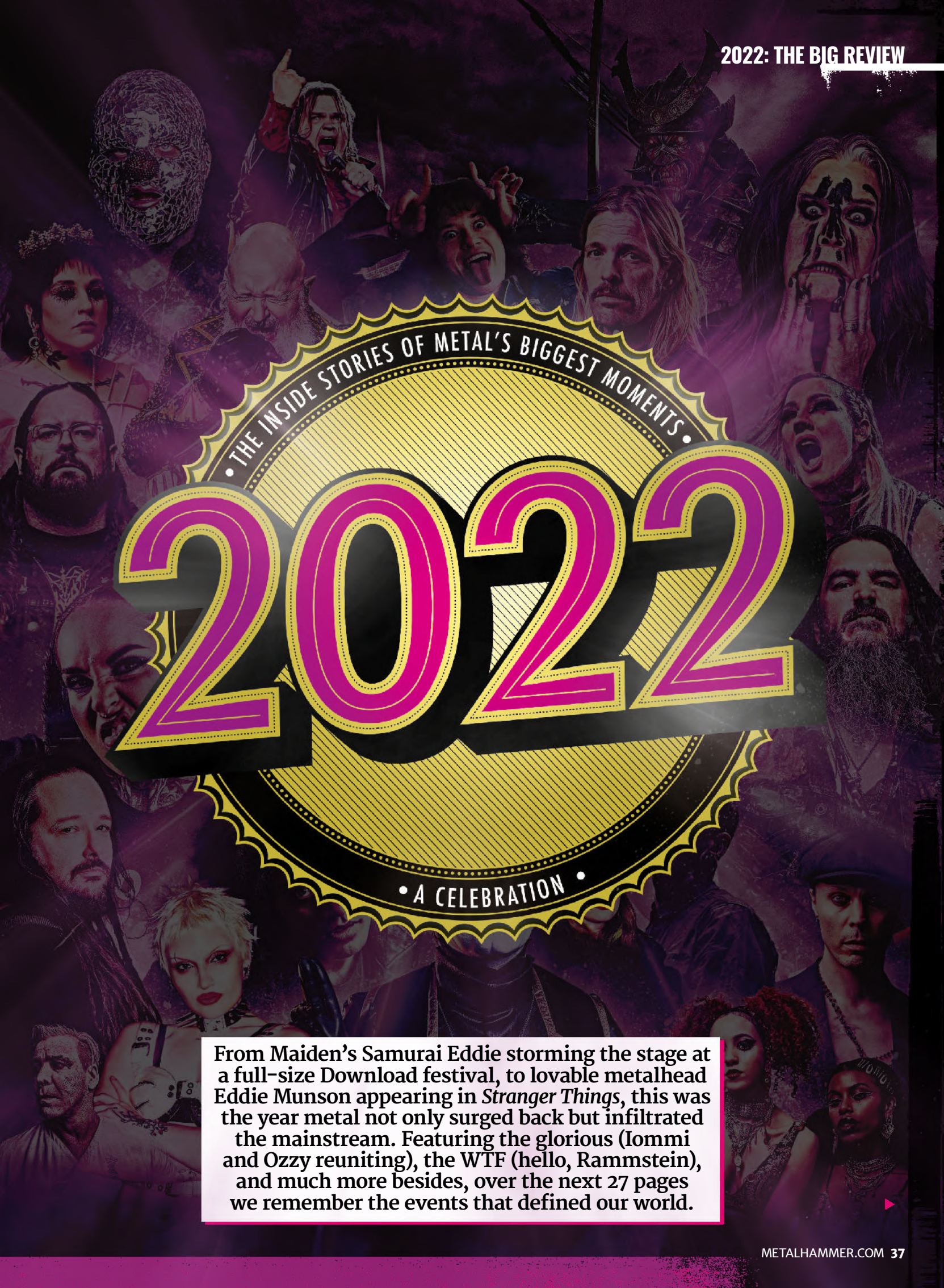
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• THE INSIDE STORIES OF METAL'S BIGGEST MOMENTS •

2022

• A CELEBRATION •

From Maiden's Samurai Eddie storming the stage at a full-size Download festival, to lovable metalhead Eddie Munson appearing in *Stranger Things*, this was the year metal not only surged back but infiltrated the mainstream. Featuring the glorious (Iommi and Ozzy reuniting), the WTF (hello, Rammstein), and much more besides, over the next 27 pages we remember the events that defined our world.

THE YEAR THAT...

METAL THRIVED

Two years of unprecedented pandemic chaos had the music industry on its knees. In 2022, heavy metal didn't just rise to the challenge – it went far beyond expectations

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

After two years of confusion, grief and delays, it was time for metal to shit or get out of the kitchen. And shit we did. All over the mainstream. Metallica and Ghost went viral on TikTok, My Chemical Romance turned Milton Keynes into a gridlocked recreation of Hot Topic, Slipknot clambered up global album charts and Rammstein... well, Rammstein filed a restraining order against one of the biggest ticket resale sites, released a career-highlight record with *Zeit*, and, in a show of solidarity with their queer fans, revealed they'd all had erotic escapades with men. Bloody lads.

Rock and metal invaded people's homes whether they liked it or not. Want to watch Taika Waititi spunk away Marvel's money in the new Thor film? Soundtracked by GN'R. That new Jonas Åkerlund series, *Clark*? Scored by Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt, and featuring cameos from members of Nifelheim, Watain, Ghost, and the much-missed Hank Von Hell. Meanwhile, 10-year-old British vocalist Harper wowed judges on *America's Got Talent* by screaming along to Spiritbox's *Holy Roller*.

But we had all had quite enough of being inside. Metal comes to life *live*, and in 2022 it came Backstreet bastard back, all right. Following its downsized Pilot edition last year, Download brought Kiss, Iron Maiden and Biffy Clyro. Come early August, Bloodstock rolled out a reformed Mercyful Fate and, during an unbelievably sweaty secret set, Machine Head's first festival

performance in a decade. It was extraordinary, sure, but best of all, it felt *normal*. We were doing what we loved again: scoffing overpriced food, headbanging, and having the best time with mates. Oh, and did we mention the likes of Ghost, Parkway Drive, Architects, Machine Head, Amon Amarth, Evanescence and Within Temptation played arenas?

On a smaller scale, Knotfest's inaugural Pulse Of The Maggots Festival went down in Birmingham, spotlighting the likes of Sylosis, Heriot and Orbit Culture. Eager to champion the underdog, Knotfest announced a Pantera covers band, featuring the two remaining members plus Zakk Wylde and Charlie Benante, would be playing their Colombia and Chile events. Huh.

Concerning *actual* comebacks, there have been a fair few. Shoeless nerd Steven Wilson ripped his Pink Floyd-meets-Meshuggah prog band, Porcupine Tree, from hypersleep, returning with gorgeous album *Closure/Continuation* and selling out Wembley Arena. Him's Ville Valo finally announced his debut solo album, *Neon Noir*, and a spanking new tour, while Fieldy bounced back from his Korn hiatus by releasing music with his side-project, StillWell.

Dave Lombardo sat behind Testament's drumkit after 23 years away, and in a move straight from a Paul Thomas Anderson film about regret, Ivan Moody said he was quitting 5FDP to spend more time with his kids, only to walk back on his decision shortly after. He was clearly taking

notes from Judas Priest, who started the year by relieving Andy Sneap of his live guitar duties, copping an unbelievable amount of flak for it, then reinstating him five days later. Whoops. ▶

METALHEADS BECAME COOL... KIND OF



Ghost returned to arenas to tickle our taints. Yay!





Papa Het and Joseph 'Eddie Munson' Quinn took metal to the mainstream

In similarly 'eh?!' fashion, we felt ourselves age like rotten banana peel when Killswitch Engage's *Alive Or Just Breathing*, Mastodon's *Remission* and Korn's *Untouchables* all enjoyed their 20th birthdays.

In one of the year's ugliest splits, Every Time I Die canned their UK tour dates and called it quits. The Buffalo hardcore luminaries fizzled out in a flurry of he-said-she-said social media bullshit, making Corey Taylor and Machine Gun Kelly's never-ending, beating-a-dead-horse beef seem even more trivial than usual.

On the subject of beating and meat, ex-Megadeth guitarist Dave Ellefson formed a new band with former members of Entombed A.D. and Decapitated. They're called Dieth. They're great. Meanwhile, Ellefson's former boss, Dave Mustaine, made headlines for being rude to a guitar tech at Barcelona Rock Fest. Oh dear.

But bands didn't need to go for each other's throats to keep things interesting. Satyricon's latest record was released in tandem with an exhibition in Oslo, displaying the art of Norway's most famous painter, Edvard Munch. Across the border, the Cliff Burton Museum opened in Sweden. Built near the site of Cliff's death in 1986, the project could have been nothing more than bad-taste dark

tourism. Thankfully, it was a lovingly curated celebration of Metallica's iconic bassist who was taken far too soon.

Speaking of celebrations, we gorged upon a glut of heavy metal films, with everything from the Ronnie James Dio documentary *Dreamers Never Die*, to the absurd GWAR biopic (*This Is Gwar*), and the Foo Fighters' affectionately naff B-movie, *Studio 666*. Coming-of-age tale *Metal Lords* hit Netflix, while record label Better Noise released horror movie *The Retaliators*, featuring Five Finger Death Punch and more, plus a star-packed soundtrack.

On a grassroots level, too, heavy music was not so much turning heads but spinning them right round like a record, baby. Even in black metal, some unique projects clawed out of the mire. Blackbraid brought Native American culture to the fore in a flurry of folksy instrumentation and hefty BM, while Spider God broke Bandcamp with a pop covers

album so ridiculously hyper, it should shame the members of Punk Rock Factory into retirement.

All that seems bittersweet, then, given the absolute heroes we lost along the way. We were just 20 days into January when Meat Loaf left us. The following month, grunge legend Mark Lanegan passed away. In March, Foo Fighters' Taylor Hawkins suddenly died at age 50. And on May 11, the world got a little less fun. The cassette-hoarding, hug-dispensing blitzkrieg of banter that was Trevor Strnad passed away, leaving a hole in the underground and his band, The Black Dahlia Murder.

It wasn't just musicians we lost. Jonny Z, the man who founded Megaforce Records with his wife Marsha in 1982 with the sole purpose of signing Metallica, died in February.

Two months later, Sylvia Lancaster, mother of Sophie Lancaster and founder of the Sophie Lancaster Foundation, passed away. Since Sophie's horrific murder 15 years ago, Sylvia had worked tirelessly to raise awareness of hate crimes against people from alternative subcultures, receiving an OBE for her efforts in 2014. In a world full of cruelty, Sylvia was kind.

Elsewhere, people were still dealing with the trauma brought on by Covid.

THE CONVERSATION AROUND MENTAL HEALTH IN HEAVY MUSIC EXPANDED

Orbit Culture at Pulse
Of The Maggots

Korn wanted it that way

We'll always remember
Sylvia Lancaster, who worked
tirelessly in Sophie's name

Satyricon got arty

a step closer to normalising the preservation of one's mental health.

This topic was dissected further in 2022's most essential book for rock musicians and fans: *Bodies*, by Ian Winwood. The veteran music journalist's elevator pitch was essentially 'the industry destroys people and enables substance abuse'. Brutal, moving, and pulling fewer punches than Danzig against the North Side Kings, *Bodies* expanded the conversation around mental health in heavy music by just being honest.

That's not to say we didn't have a laugh in 2022. Korn covered Backstreet Boys classic *I Want It That Way*. The internet feigned shock as Slipknot's Tortilla Man finally revealed his identity (Michael Pfaff, obviously, who played keyboards in Clown's band Dirty Little Rabbits). New research from Psychnet suggested that straight men play extreme metal mainly to impress their equally straight, male counterparts – woof. Ignore the fact that they only surveyed 44 participants. Print the legend!

In more concrete terms, this was the year when metalheads became cool... kind of. *Stranger Things*' newly introduced mosher, Eddie Munson, captured the hearts and loins of viewers worldwide, inspiring endless lines of merch, TikToks and cries of 'My culture isn't your costume!' from sceptics who won't sleep in a bed unless the duvet and sheets are double denim.

So, what next? A bells and whistles four-day Download is coming in 2023, as is Rammstein's continued subversion of the stadium rock experience, as the

Kristin Hayter retired
Lingua Ignota

The pandemic led us to reflect on death in a near-obsessive fashion and separated musicians from loved ones, support networks and the road – but some have since experienced healing. James Hetfield opened up to a Metallica crowd in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, saying he felt like “an old guy [who] can't play anymore”. Nonsense, mate. Touchingly, his bandmates gave him a group hug.

Kristin Hayter announced the retirement of her traumatic one-woman project, Lingua Ignota, in order to heal. Following Faith No More and Mr. Bungle's cancelled tour dates, Mike Patton also spoke out. “[Therapists] basically diagnosed me as having agoraphobia; like, I was afraid of people,” he told *Rolling Stone* in July. The support he received was genuinely heartwarming, nudging heavy music

ball-gagged Berliners take Europe again. Jim Root and Corey Taylor could be cooking up a non-Slipknot project, Slayer's Kerry King is set to return with new music, and we can expect fresh releases from everyone from Babymetal to Immortal, and Avenged Sevenfold to Nile.

Despite the world opening up ‘properly’ and touring getting back on track, it's been a weird 12 months. It's alright to feel uncomfortable pushing sweaty topless people around in a circular motion. It's OK to skip a gig if you're not feeling great. We're muddling through the most significant shift in human behaviour we can remember, compounded by an energy crisis and the fucking horrific war in Ukraine. You're allowed an off day. 2022 was the year all this happened – and you were a part of it. ■



THE YEAR THAT...

SLIPKNOT
WENT WEIRD

The nonet roared back with an album that featured all the usual pummeling, plus some experimental twists

WORDS: MÖRAT • PICTURE: ANTHONY SCANGA

If 2022 could be summed up in one word, it would, for Slipknot bassist Alessandro 'Vman' Venturella, be "relief". Sure, we're on the brink of World War III, and the parts of the planet that aren't on fire are under water, but at least he doesn't have to wear a mask anymore – an irony not lost on a man who wears a mask for a living.

"It was a weird one," he says of 2022, "because everything was last minute. Like, if we don't do it now, we won't get the opportunity. We started on the album in 2020 and then worked on it all throughout 2021. Then in 2022, we were getting back into the swing with tours. The problem with the band is there's so many of us, sometimes it's just not viable to do a tour. If you have two weeks off, you've got 50 people sleeping in hotels, doing nothing. You've got nine bandmembers and 50 crew!"

Corey had caught Covid in August 2021 while touring his first solo record, *CMFT*, so when Slipknot resumed touring in autumn/winter 2021, and then embarked on more dates from March 2022, the band were cautious. They put strict safety protocols in place, and no guests were allowed backstage apart from wives of bandmembers, with the band essentially still living in a bubble. Moreover, there were mental and physical adjustments to be made, not least being onstage for two hours wearing a boilersuit and – ahem – a mask.

"I'd been in studio mode," says Vman. "I'd got back into the technicalities of bass playing, but you're sitting around the studio all day, eating food that's handed to you."

In November 2021, the band released *The Chapeltown Rag*, a typical Slipknot rager that lashed out against the noise of social media, and the first taster of their seventh album. We had to wait until July before Slipknot finally announced the album's title (*The End, So Far*) and put out another single – the frenetic stomper *The Dying Song (Time To Sing)*. They played it live for the first time in Prague on July 28, and for the second time at the inaugural Knotfest Germany – yet another pin in the map for the Knotfest brand.

"Knotfest Germany was incredible!" smiles Vman. "Everyone had ideas about what to put in the

"THE BEST PART WAS BEATING ED SHEERAN!"

VMAN

setlist, and we wanted to showcase a couple of songs from the new album, like *The Chapeltown Rag* and *The Dying Song*. But the way the world's been, it had been such a long time since we'd seen so many kids, and it was like, 'Let's just come back with the hits!'"

Corey had likened *The End, So Far* to a "darker version" of 2004's *Vol. 3: The Subliminal Verses*, and in August we were treated to the twisted balladry of *Yen*. It was an indicator of what was to come, but it wasn't until the album's release on September 30 that fans really understood what he meant. *Adderall* was woozy, trippy, and a world away from Slipknot's usual punishing album openers, while *Acidic* paid tribute to cult 90s band Acid Bath and *Medicine For The Dead* featured a vocoder. It was unmistakably Slipknot, but leaned into their weirder, more experimental side.

Speaking to us ahead of release, Corey explained *The End, So Far* was a new chapter for the band. "I guess the title is a reflection of the end of predisposition [when it comes to our writing], and the end of being too



The 18-legged beast
will be stomping all
over the world in 2023



self-conscious to really have the courage to express ourselves. It's basically the end of what was, and the beginning of what could be."

The *End, So Far* shot to No. 1 in the UK and the US. "The best part for me was beating the ginger bloke – what's his name? Ed Sheeran!" Vman chuckles. "I grew up in the hardcore scene with bands like Knuckledust, so getting a No.1 in the UK was a surreal moment. It's also great for heavy metal."

That said, the album divided fans. "This one easily smokes your last two albums," enthused one. Another raged, "Well, this sucked an entire ass." One surprising, high-profile critic was guitarist Jim Root, who suggested the band could have taken more time with pre-production and "put out a better product". He admitted he couldn't contribute much to *The End, So Far* because he was "stressed out and depressed" due to the pandemic, and praised Vman for "stepping forward and picking up some of the slack along with Clown, who's becoming a lot more involved in song arranging".

"I'm more into the heavier, technical aspect of playing," explains Vman, understandably skirting Jim's

comments. "But there's a lot of experimenting, especially with Mike [Michael Pfaff, aka Tortilla Man] being such a great pianist, so we started playing around with a lot of melodies. We sent some stuff to Corey, and he put some vocals on it, and it was like, 'Wow, he took it somewhere completely different!' That opened up the more melodic aspect of the band, harmonies and stuff, and I love it. It's kind of refreshing, as opposed to 12 – what Clown calls – barnburners."

Vman adds that this is the most he's heard of turntablist Sid Wilson and sampler/keyboardist Craig Jones "in a long time", and that "you can actually hear the percussion".

"It feels like everyone's got a spot on this one," he says. "I'm a massive Mastodon fan, and they're one of those bands where their albums are more like a piece of music and not just four songs and some filler. I felt like with this album, it's more like a journey. *Adderall* was going to be completely different, almost digital and abstract. There were no real drums to it, and then once I put the bass on, it turned into something completely different – almost UK indie music. I was very proud to see it grow into what it's become."

"IT'S REFRESHING, AS OPPOSED TO 12 BARNBURNERS"

VMAN

As for the lows of 2022... "As far as the band goes, I don't see any," Vman smiles. "Everyone's just so happy to be playing music again. [Not touring] was probably the lowest point of feeling like you were in a dystopian universe."

For 2023, Slipknot have announced the first Knotfest Australia, plus dates in Indonesia, Japan and Europe – including a stop at the mighty Download festival, which they'll be headlining for the *fifth* time – and will hopefully be bringing more of that new material.

Meanwhile, now they've fulfilled their contractual obligations to Roadrunner, Clown has said he wants the band to release singles rather than albums. Could *The End, So Far* really be the end of Slipknot as we know them? Whatever happens, it seems the band have the world at their 18 feet. **H**

THE END, SO FAR IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER. SLIPKNOT HEADLINE DOWNLOAD 2023



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THE YEAR THAT...

STRANGER THINGS MADE METAL MAINSTREAM

New character Eddie Munson was a lovable metalhead who captured the hearts of fans and boosted Metallica

WORDS: MATT MILLS

It was inevitable that sci-fi/horror show *Stranger Things* would return for a fourth season. Four days after Netflix released season three on July 4, 2019, they announced it had broken their viewing records: more than 40 million people had already seen at least one episode, and 18.2 million had binge-watched the entire thing.

In September, they announced the show's next instalment, while fans obsessed over questions such as, "Is Jim Hopper really dead?", "What's gonna happen in California?", and "Will I get to make more memes about Joyce's magnets?" They had to wait three years for answers.

Despite the loooooong build-up, *Stranger Things 4* would become a pop culture powerhouse. By the start of the year, Netflix had already drip-fed people with teasers. These ranged from short-form videos – which confirmed Hopper was still alive and slaving away in a Soviet camp, and insinuated Eleven would return to the lab – to the episode titles. In April, the first full-length trailer came out, before the opening eight minutes of episode one, *The Hellfire Club*, got published on YouTube a week prior to the series premiere.

Volume 1 (the season's first seven episodes), which dropped on May 27, instantly got people talking. For starters, it was so much freakier than before. Jamie Campbell Bower played new baddie Vecna, who torments the town of Hawkins' traumatised teenagers, before mutilating and murdering them. Moreover, the first episode introduced Eddie fucking Munson. The acerbic metalhead led *The Hellfire Club*, AKA Hawkins High's gang of Dungeons & Dragons players,

with a Dio patch on his back and some healthy disrespect for the mainstream's bullshit. Yet, while film and TV almost always depict metal fans as sociopaths or loveable knuckleheads, Eddie actually seemed like a real human. He was endearingly funny, fancied the coolest girl in school, and had a narrative arc that saw him overcoming his compulsion to leg it when terrified.

TikTok started thirsting over the cast's most popular new addition, and compilations of Eddie clips made by infatuated viewers began to dominate the app. Others went even further by dressing up in denim, leather and Hellfire Club shirts, or editing themselves into moments of

Puppets. Soon after, he sacrificed himself to the bat swarm, winning his friends more time.

By this point, season four was no stranger to thrusting 80s anthems into 2022's cultural discourse. In episode four, the character of Maxine Mayfield had escaped Vecna thanks to her friends playing her favourite song, Kate Bush's *Running Up That Hill*, which yanked her back to reality. Not only was it a touching allusion to the fact music can give people respite from mental health struggles, it sent the song to No.1 in the UK charts – 37 years after it peaked at No.3.

Metallica got a similar boost off the back of the finale. Thirty-six years after its release, *Master Of Puppets* hit the UK Top 40 and entered the Billboard Hot 100. On July 5, the band uploaded the clip of the world-saving shred to Instagram and wrote: "The way [showrunners] The Duffer Brothers have incorporated music into *Stranger Things* has always been next level, so we were beyond psyched for them to not only include *Master Of Puppets* in the show, but to have such a pivotal scene built around it."

Three days later, the band posted a TikTok clip of all four members miming along to the now-viral footage, complete with instruments and Hellfire Club shirts. They even hung out with Eddie Munson actor Joseph Quinn backstage at Lollapalooza and released some *Stranger Things* crossover merch, before James Hetfield dressed as Eddie for Halloween.

All the while, Metallica's TikTok popularity exploded. Gatekeepers got mad, raging over this new, "fake" following, and the fact that a band who'd already sold millions of albums were becoming mainstream.

A METALHEAD WAS SEXY IN THE REAL WORLD

the show to mime snogging him. An out-and-out metalhead was sexy in the real world. When was the last time that happened?

Munson Mania only got more hectic when *Stranger Things'* second volume was released on July 1. During the season's two-and-a-half-hour-long finale, Hawkins' misfit heroes enacted their plan to kill Vecna: while five of them went to his old house and its Upside Down counterpart to set the bastard on fire, Eddie and series veteran Dustin Henderson distracted his legion of demon bats. To get the job done, TikTok's hard-rocking heartthrob grabbed his favourite electric guitar and amplifier, and blasted out a take on *Master Of*

One of us:
Eddie Munson



"I'm sorry Metallica for all the fake *Stranger Things* fans," one TikTok user commented, to which the band had the perfect reply: "Don't be sorry. Everyone is welcome in the Metallica family. If they like *Puppets*, chances are they'll find plenty of other songs to get into." Class.

Despite such acceptance, pockets of TikTok vainly tried to cancel the biggest metal band on the planet. In a now-deleted video, user Serena Trueblood lambasted them as problematic, referencing 90s footage and photos of the band and making allegations of racist behaviour. The criticisms didn't stick, with one fan

tweeting: "The pipeline of TikTok teenagers discovering Metallica through Eddie Munson of *Stranger Things* and then a week later calling them out for being problematic is probably the funniest thing I have ever fucking seen."

As for Eddie, his heroism only made him hotter. After the finale, Joseph Quinn made his late-night talk show debut with Jimmy Fallon, while the character who's inspired more thirst than a drought doubtlessly contributed to the show's renewal for a fifth and final season.

Netflix have revealed that the first episode of season five will be called

HIS HEROISM ONLY MADE HIM HOTTER

The Crawl, with some fans linking it to a tattoo on Eddie's arm and the *Master Of Puppets* lyric, 'Come crawling faster, obey your master', fuelling speculation he'll come back from the dead and/or become Vecna's servant. Whether or not Eddie returns (*stranger things* – ahem – have happened), he'll always have the legacy of making heavy music the coolest it's been since the days of Limp Bizkit and Linkin Park. Most metal ever indeed. **H**



THE YEAR THAT...

WE CELEBRATED
TAYLOR HAWKINS

Following their drummer's tragic death, the rock world rallied around the Foo Fighters for two huge tribute concerts

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT • PICTURE: JOBY SESSIONS

On March 25, 2022, a light went out in the world of rock. Taylor Hawkins, the renowned and globally adored drummer of the Foo Fighters, passed away at the age of 50. He had been found unresponsive in his hotel room in Bogotá, Colombia, during the band's South American tour.

When the news of his death broke, there was a monumental outpouring of well-wishes, love and heartache. Taylor meant many things to many different people, and the effect of his untimely passing was felt not just by his thousands of fans, but by a vast number of legendary musicians who knew him.

Two months later, it was announced that those very musicians – the likes of Metallica's Lars Ulrich, AC/DC's Brian Johnson, Wolfgang Van Halen, Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor, Rush, The Darkness's Justin Hawkins, Joan Jett and many more – would gather to perform in celebration of Taylor's life and legacy, on September 3 at London's Wembley Stadium and on September 27 at Los Angeles' Kia Forum.

At the London show, there were 90,000 crying/dancing/singing fans, and millions more watching via a livestream. Money raised from ticket and merchandise sales benefited Music Support and MusiCares, charities chosen by the Hawkins family. It was an all-out love-fest of goodwill, good memories and good music, and, in the words of Foo Fighters frontman Dave Grohl, it was a "gigantic fucking night for a gigantic fucking person".

For The Struts frontman Luke Spiller, who performed *We Will Rock You* with Queen, the loss of Taylor Hawkins also meant the loss of a great friend. He first met the drummer in 2016, during an aftershow party at BottleRock Festival in Napa, California.

"He performed with his band Chevy Metal," Luke recalls, "and he asked if I wanted to get up and do a couple of

Queen songs. My first impression of him was that he was really cool, really down to earth, and probably one of the only people on this earth I would consider a bigger Queen fan than me, so that was quite funny."

Luke's friendship with Taylor blossomed when The Struts supported Foo Fighters on their Concrete And Gold US tour in 2017/18. "On the tour, we would hang out a lot, talk about music and, you know, bitch and moan with each other as musicians do when they get together," he remembers. "I also sang *Under Pressure* with him every night, which was really special. After that, we kept in touch; he would invite me around his house, where we would jam and talk a lot. We even had Thanksgiving together. We were friends right up until the end."

Nandi Bushell, a 12-year-old multi-instrumentalist from Ipswich, dazzled the London audience when she joined the Foo Fighters onstage for their 1999 classic, *Learn To Fly*. She first crossed paths with the band in 2020 when she challenged Dave Grohl to a drum battle online. From there, she went on to meet and eventually play with the band the following year, replacing Taylor behind the kit for *Everlong* during a show at the Los Angeles Forum. "We hung out and he was really, really nice," she says of Taylor. "I watched him play and he was obviously amazing as usual."

Although Eurovision star Sam Ryder, who performed *Somebody To Love* with Queen at the London event, never got the chance to meet Taylor, he felt a similar sense of closeness. "The passion that Taylor had made him not just incredible and inspiring

to watch, but you felt everything that he did," he explains. "So it doesn't even matter if people never met him – you felt like you did, and like you're part of that story."

Sam was headhunted for the tribute gig by Roger Taylor himself, who had seen his Queen covers on social media. He missed the initial phone call asking him to play, because he was flying in a Spitfire with the viral TikTok personality/trainspotter Francis Bourgeois at the time – which is "the coolest story," he smiles. When Sam landed, his response to the invite was an automatic "Hell, yes!"

Luke Spiller had made plans with Taylor to recreate their BottleRock jam of Queen songs after Foo Fighters' tour had finished. "We were planning on doing a whole lot of shows when he got back," says the Struts singer. "And so that obviously didn't happen, but then a couple of weeks later, I received a phone call from Pat [Smear, Foos guitarist], who said, 'Look, I know that you were meant to be doing these shows with Taylor. Like, he really loved you. How would you like to do some songs with Queen at Wembley?' It was pretty insane."

There were a number of rehearsals for the London show, including one at Wembley Stadium, another at Metropolis Studios, and, for Sam, one at Roger Taylor's house. "It was such an old-school way of rehearsing," he says. "There was just a monitor for each of us. Roger on his drums. Brian May's guitars literally turned up all the way. I always heard rumours about his amp, like how loud he has it set, but it's true."

Luke, who had to pull out of the US concert last minute after contracting Covid, recalls: "I did a bunch of rehearsals in LA to begin with, and then I did the rehearsals in London along with a soundcheck. It was just really, really surreal. I don't think I've ever been in a room with that much talent."

For most fans, the idea of being surrounded by so many rock heroes would be an unimaginable prospect. For the performers, as Luke explains, it was similarly overwhelming.

"There were a lot of mixed emotions," he says. "It was such a monumental event. It's hard to describe, because I've never been to anything like that. There was laughter, there were tears. It was just like a rollercoaster, and it brought back a bunch of memories. It was a very unique atmosphere. Something that I don't think I will experience again, and to be honest, I don't really want to."

Child prodigy Nandi, however, took the day's activities in her stride. "It was

"THE SHOW WAS A ROLLERCOASTER OF MIXED EMOTIONS"

LUKE SPILLER, THE STRUTS

The remaining Fooos saying farewell to their fallen friend



a bit emotional before, but I wasn't really nervous for the actual gig, because it was so quick," she explains. "I just imagined being there in front of my 100,000 [social media] followers."

Sam embraced the bittersweet experience, taking note of the day's poignancy and cause, while making sure to take in how special it was. "You're reminding yourself of the sadness of the occasion as well as the celebratory aspect of it," he says. "All these people are getting together and they're grieving. But they're also putting on the best rock show of the last decade."

His favourite memory of the day was hanging out "backstage in Queen's dressing room with Brian May, Roger, their families and their wives/partners, just eating celery and hummus, chatting and getting to have a bit of time together. It was also so lovely seeing how beautifully normal these people are."

"That night reminded me of what a healthy relationship with music really looks like," he adds. "And it was so welcoming. There wasn't any kind of hierarchy or ego, arrogance or aloofness. Everyone was inclusive and brought you into their conversations."

Then there was the partying. Most of us would have emptied our bank accounts to be a fly on the wall for a night. "We all stayed in this big hotel in London, so every other night we would all go out to big restaurants,"

recalls Luke. "And then we would end up at the hotel bar, and, in all honesty, I was in bed at about 4am every day, and then at 5pm I'd order room service breakfast, and then go straight back down to the bar."

"When everybody was there, it was just incredible. Like Paul McCartney was hitting my vape pen and then he spilled his Martini over my jacket, and then tried to suck it up off my arm. It was really cool."

In many ways, the tributes were a tool for healing. Not just to grieve Taylor Hawkins, but to reflect on other fallen musicians. In London, Rush's Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson began their performance with a nod to their late drummer, Neil Peart, while Brian May remembered Queen's tribute to Freddie Mercury at the same venue 30 years prior. In an interview with *Classic Rock*, Wolfgang Van Halen said that playing Van Halen hits gave him a sense of closure after losing his dad, legendary guitarist Eddie Van Halen, in 2020.

Although the shadow of grief marked much of each night, the prevailing mood was of gratitude and togetherness; of appreciating our musicians and loved ones right now, while celebrating the lives of those no longer with us. This was expressed through the magnitude and sheer talent of each guest onstage: AC/DC's Brian Johnson returning to the spotlight to blast the sound system

"I'LL REMEMBER TAYLOR'S PASSION AND SMILE"

SAM RYDER

with his unmistakable piercing wails, alongside Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich; Brian May, setting the stadium alight with his acoustic take on Queen's tear-jerking ballad *Love Of My Life*; Taylor's 16-year-old son, Shane, performing a hard-hitting, touching rendition of *My Hero*.

On both nights, many of Taylor's favourite songs were played, as well as the songs that defined his career. It was a sonic tapestry of his life, which certainly won't be forgotten. "I will remember the passion and the smile," remarks Sam.

"I'll always remember how kind he was and how much time he always gave to me – his big loud laugh and his big cheesy grin," says Luke. "And how he would sing in his husky voice."

"And I think his drum technique was amazing. He had a great drumming face; he used to almost gurn, you could really see that he was really going for it. He was always practising and always striving to be better. And he was so humble, so whenever you were in his presence, it wasn't like you were talking to this really well renowned rock star. He was just a really great guy." ■

Phil and Zakk... will they do the Abbotts justice?

THE YEAR THAT... A PANTERA REUNION WAS ANNOUNCED

With the Abbott brothers gone and fans unsure about supporting Phil Anselmo, the decision remains divisive

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

Rumours of a Pantera reunion had been circulating for well over a decade by the time former drummer Vinnie Paul Abbott passed away in 2018; then, it seemed like any opportunity had vanished with him. But in July of this year, Billboard reported that Pantera's two remaining former members, Philip Anselmo and bassist Rex Brown, had struck a deal with booking agency Artist Group International. They would reform the band with guitarist Zakk Wylde and Anthrax drummer Charlie Benante for a North American tour that no one had seen coming.

The reaction online was mixed. With no official word from the band yet, some people didn't believe the news, while some were giddy with excitement about the prospect of seeing some of metal's most beloved songs played live again. Others were frankly disgusted about the idea of a band without the founding Abbott

brothers – Vinnie and his guitarist brother Dimebag Darrell, who was tragically shot and killed onstage in 2004 – daring to call themselves Pantera, particularly given the well-documented animosity between Vinnie and Phil. The unease was compounded for those still troubled by Phil's appearance at the 2016 fundraising concert Dimebash, when he shouted the words 'white power' and raised his hand in a Nazi salute.

Following the reunion news, Zakk seemed to address some concerns. Speaking to Danny Wimmer Presents reporters at Inkarcaration festival,

IT'S THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL REUNION IN MEMORY

he acknowledged that "obviously, it's not Pantera", before likening the band to the Led Zeppelin reunion with Jason Bonham on drums. "It's like when we do the Dimebash: it's a celebration of Dime's greatness," he said. "It's a Pantera celebration. You're celebrating Vinnie and Dime's greatness and celebrating all the mountains that Pantera conquered and crushed."

It wasn't until a month later, on August 20, that a clip on the official Pantera Twitter account indicated *something* was happening. Within a week they'd confirmed appearances at Knotfests in Colombia, Chile and Brazil. The band then tweeted a video featuring Vinnie and Dime with the caption: 'For The Brothers, For The Fans, For Legacy', suggesting the reunion was a tribute to the Abbotts, rather than anything cynical.

Pantera were also added to the bill of the Hell And Heaven festival in Mexico City. At time of going to press no North American or European dates have been confirmed, but there's clearly an appetite; their show at the 5,400-capacity Teatro Caupolicán in Chile sold out so quickly, it was upgraded to the 17,000-capacity Movistar Arena.

And that's where we stand with the most controversial reunion in memory. The excitement of fans who never got to see Pantera is understandable, but for those who remember their messy ending, the uneasy feeling of a legacy being tarnished in front of their eyes is real. It's impossible to ignore the waves this reunion's making, and it's gonna be an interesting 2023... **H**

Brum notes:
Ozzy rises like
a phoenix

THE YEAR THAT...

OZZY OSBOURNE GOT BACK ONSTAGE

The Double O recovered from surgery and surprised us all by appearing at Birmingham's Commonwealth Games' closing ceremony

WORDS: RICH CHAMBERLAIN

We never expected it to happen. Speaking with *Metal Hammer* ahead of releasing his 13th solo album, *Patient Number 9*, Ozzy told us he was desperate to get back onstage. Due to the pandemic, along with surgery in June to remove two metal plates that had been screwed into his spine following a bathroom fall in January 2019, his last live appearance had been in December 2018.

"My wife and family mean the world to me," he told us. "I've been home for the longest time I've ever been home and they've been fucking great. But do I want to stay here doing this? You've got to be fucking joking. I will be up there if I have to fucking crawl up there."

The opening ceremony of Birmingham's Commonwealth Games rolled around on Thursday July 28, with legendary Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi superbly repping metal and his home city at the Alexander Stadium. There was no sign of the Ozzman, but he tweeted that he was "really proud" of his former bandmate.

So at the closing ceremony, on Monday August 8, we were thrilled to see Ozzy and Tony team up with Adam Wakeman on bass and Tommy Clufetos on drums for a snippet of *Iron Man* and a full rendition of *Paranoid*. The Sabbath pair were back! As they saw out the Games, fireworks went off around them, and a grinning Ozzy screamed: "Birmingham forever!"

To find out how the organisers pulled off the unexpected appearance, we spoke to Zoe Snow, executive

producer for Birmingham Ceremonies, who looked after both the opening and closing ceremonies of the Commonwealth Games.

How did Ozzy become involved in the Commonwealth Games?

Zoe: "From the very first meeting with our creative directors, Amber Rimell and Bronski at Tawbox, they had a real vision for what they wanted the show to be, and the closing ceremony was always going to be a journey through Birmingham's incredible musical heritage. Ozzy and Sabbath were the first thing that came out of their mouths in the first meeting. That was the way to close the show. We had Tony Iommi agreed for the opening ceremony, and we reached out very early to Ozzy and the answer was that he just wasn't well enough to do it – even though he would have loved to do it. That was about nine months before the ceremony."

So how did you get him?!

Zoe: "A week before the closing ceremony, we decided to just give Ozzy one more try. We reached out to Tony and asked even if Ozzy couldn't do it, would he be interested in putting together some kind of supergroup and we would play *Iron Man* and *Paranoid* and have a real nod to Sabbath. We thought Ozzy might be able to send a message from LA just to be part of the show. We spoke to Sharon [Osbourne] and she said Ozzy loved the opening ceremony. We asked for permission to use Sabbath's songs for the ceremony and Ozzy said, 'Nobody is singing my



Executive producer Zoe Snow with Ralph Baker, Tony Iommi's manager

songs in my city. I'm coming home to Birmingham.' We were like, 'Oh my God! Shit!' They flew in, we kept it all quiet and did it."

What were rehearsals like?

Zoe: "Sharon was instrumental in putting the band together. On the Monday afternoon, we cleared the whole stadium and did a 15-minute soundcheck. Ozzy was great. He swore a lot and I said, 'Please don't swear, it's going to be live on the BBC!' Ha ha!"

He certainly looked happy to be there.

Zoe: "Sharon and Kelly [Osbourne] came over with Ozzy and they were all thrilled to be there. We snuck him into the stadium and he was all smiles and selfies. He said he wouldn't have missed it. I was with Kelly and Sharon in the audience and they were both crying. Ozzy and Tony hadn't seen each other for years due to Covid, and they were thrilled to be together again. Ozzy was so down to earth – he was all about the fans, the music and Birmingham. Everyone said they were just like this normal family having a great time being back in their home city. Tony showed me a text that Ozzy had sent before he got on the plane, saying, 'I can't wait to see you, my old friend.' Onstage they wanted to be together. You could see how they interacted."

The crowd reaction was insane!

Zoe: "The stadium went absolutely crazy. I've never heard a sound like it. Everyone was on their feet and it was absolutely electric. I knew Ozzy was important to Birmingham and vice versa, but the response was incredible. Those songs still connect with people. I think if we'd offered he would have carried on and on and on, but it was incredible to do what we did. It was the perfect ending." **H**

PATIENT NUMBER 9 IS OUT NOW VIA SONY



Reunited, and it feels so good

"KELLY AND SHARON WERE BOTH CRYING"

GETTY, PRESS

ZOE SNOW, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR BIRMINGHAM CEREMONIES



THE YEAR THAT...

IRON MAIDEN CONTINUED BUILDING A LEGACY

Shaking off the pandemic, Bruce and co brought their Legacy Of The Beast tour to Download and beyond. Up the Irons!

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: KEVIN NIXON

No one could ever accuse Iron Maiden of shirking their touring duties. Like everyone else, they had to twiddle their thumbs during the worst of the pandemic, and by the time they returned to the stage in May 2022 in Zagreb, Croatia, nearly three gig-less years had passed. Bruce Dickinson must have been chewing the furniture.

Not quite picking up where they left off, Iron Maiden returned to finish off the European leg of their Legacy Of The Beast tour. Rather than repeat the same old setlist, however, the British legends made the shrewd decision to debut some songs from their 2021 album, *Senjutsu*. Kicking off with the monstrous title track and continuing with singles *Stratego* and *The Writing On The Wall*, the tweaked Legacy show was arguably even more epic than before. Maiden brought back fan-favourite *Blood Brothers* for the first time in five years, and finished the whole two-hour shebang with an unprecedented final encore of *Aces High*. And as ever, a new incarnation of Eddie stole the show. Let's just say that Samurai Eddie is a fucking badass.

Meanwhile, backstage at Arena Zagreb, the band were reunited with pre-Bruce frontman Paul Di'Anno for the first time in three decades. It seems safe to say that it was an emotional occasion, not least because Maiden later announced they would be

SAMURAI EDDIE IS A FUCKING BADASS

paying Paul's remaining medical costs for the vital knee surgery that would finally enable him to return to the stage (which he did, in October).

Back in March, Maiden's classic third album, *The Number Of The Beast*, reached its 40th birthday. To celebrate, albeit several months later, they released a special triple vinyl version, with the entire *Beast Over Hammersmith* live set thrown in as a special Eddie-approved bonus. Diehard fans were pleased to note that classic B-side *Total Eclipse* had been reinstated into the track listing, replacing the oft-maligned *Gangland*. If you know, you know.

Maiden marched on across the summer. Alongside other European festivals, they triumphed again at their seventh Download. They crossed the Atlantic for dates in Brazil – including a show in front of around 100,000 at Rock In Rio – and then a full US tour (with a permanently grinning Trivium as main support), during which Bruce shouted at some people for smoking weed and various people said various things on Twitter. Exciting times.

The band's next tour will be called *The Future Past* and will feature material from *Senjutsu* and classic 1986 album *Somewhere In Time*. This means that there's a real possibility that Maiden will pull the likes of *Sea Of Madness*, *The Loneliness Of The Long Distance Runner* and – whisper it, Maiden nerds – the mighty *Alexander The Great* out of the bag. Throw in a few towering epics from *Senjutsu*, fire up another new Eddie and 2023 looks like another nailed-on win for the Irons. **H**

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST TRIPLE VINYL SET IS OUT NOW VIA WARNER. THE FUTURE PAST TOUR HITS THE UK IN JUNE/JULY

THE YEAR THAT...

WE LOST
TREVOR STRNAD

Gone too soon, the frontman of The Black Dahlia Murder was an exuberant personality and a death metal icon

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

One of the most tragic events of the year was the passing of Trevor Strnad. On May 11, The Black Dahlia Murder, one of the most reliably brilliant death metal bands of their generation, announced their singer had died at the devastatingly young age of 41.

Months later, it still doesn't feel real. Trevor, and by extension his band, felt like one of the most comfortable pieces of furniture in the metal world: always there, always brilliant. The definition of consistency, passion and relatability.

In a statement, the band described Trevor as "A walking encyclopedia of all things music. He was a hugger, a writer, and truly one of the world's greatest entertainers. His lyrics provided the world with stories and spells and horror and whimsy. It was his life to be your show."

They also included the number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a development that made his passing feel even sadder and more alarming.

Within hours of the news, tributes flooded in. "An icon of modern metal" was how Trivium's Matt Heafy described him. "The metal community has lost one of the greats," said Ice Nine Kills' Spencer Charnas. Hatebreed's Jamey Jasta thanked him for "The laughs, the stories, the music and so much more." Robb Flynn called it "A sad day for the metal community." On and on they went. From every era, from every facet of the metal world, the shock and sadness over his loss was keenly felt.

As the reactions unfolded, the picture of Trevor Strnad that emerged was familiar to his fans. The Black Dahlia Murder are a savagely brutal band, and Trevor's devastating scream-to-growl vocals were one of the key weapons at their disposal. But they are also a joyful band, an effervescent band. No one member epitomised that exuberance more than Trevor. His perma-grinning, hair-whirling, skipping, arm-waving live performances helped to make attendance essential every time the band rolled into your town.

The way in which Trevor performed seemed to be a distillation of how he lived; a warm, willing and genuinely funny interviewee, he constantly enthused about new artists, and the fire and devotion he had for death metal burned intensely. He was, as Arch Enemy's Alissa White-Gluz said in a social media post, "a sweetheart".

In September, The Black Dahlia Murder announced they would be continuing, with co-founding guitarist Brian Eschbach filling in for Trevor. They couldn't envisage anyone outside the band stepping into his enormous shoes. "The prospect of getting onstage with a stranger and having someone else become the face of the band after nine albums didn't seem to work," guitarist Brandon Ellis said in their comeback interview with *Decibel*. "Trevor was the public face of the band, to put someone else in that place would not have worked. It wasn't even a consideration."

While they obviously have our full support, it still seems alien to consider The Black Dahlia Murder without Trevor. His voice, his presence, his personality – all of it feels so essential. Whatever the future holds, none of us will forget him. **H**

"THE METAL COMMUNITY HAS LOST ONE OF THE GREATS"

SPENCER CHARNAS, ICE NINE KILLS



Trevor: a much-missed frontman and friend

IN THE US, THE NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE IS 800-273-8255. IN THE UK, SAMARITANS CAN BE REACHED 24 HOURS A DAY VIA 116 123

THE YEAR THAT...

JINJER BECAME GLOBAL AMBASSADORS FOR UKRAINE

Following the Russian invasion of their country, the band toured the world to rally support and raise funds

WORDS: DANNI LEIVERS • PICTURE: KATJA OGRIN

On February 24, Jinjer woke up to find their world had changed forever.

The Ukrainian metallers had stormed into 2022 thanks to 2021's stunning *Wallflowers*, the album that had taken their devastating tech-groove sound to the next level, cementing their transformation from cult favourites to modern metal mainstays. The band were excited about their packed schedule, including spring US dates with Slipknot and In This Moment, when they heard the news: Russian President Vladimir Putin had invaded their homeland with a huge military offensive, crossing the border from land, air and sea.

Guitarist Roman Ibramkhalilov, bassist Eugene Abdukhanov and drummer Vlad Ulasevich, who were all in the capital, Kyiv, witnessed the horror first-hand. Eugene, who was driving when the first bombs started to fall, told Sky News: "Everything started to blow up around me; I was lucky just to get out of there. Just pure fortune. I don't know how, but I managed to drive out."

More than 6,000 miles away, at her home in Los Angeles, vocalist Tatiana Shmayluk could only watch, "paralysed" in horror. The first person she called was Vlad. "He said, 'Well, here it is. The war has come,'" she says over Zoom today. "And for the next two weeks, I was crying."

She describes the flood of complex emotions she felt in the immediate aftermath of the invasion as a sort of survivor's guilt, revealing she couldn't even make an Instagram post because she felt "useless".

"Luckily for me, I was here. I didn't hear the sounds of the sirens, the bombing, the shaking, nothing like that," she says. "But at the same time, I had a strange feeling like I wanted to be there with them. I want to share their terror. I felt like I escaped."

Immediately, the band cancelled all their touring plans, putting a message on their Instagram account in which Eugene pleaded for people to "spread the word about Putin's aggression", and turned their focus towards the war relief effort.

In March, the band released two new t-shirt designs to raise money, each displaying the words: 'We want our home back'. On launch, the website crashed due to demand; two weeks later, they had sold 11,000 shirts and raised €130,000. A month later, when Tati and her husband went to see Deftones and Gojira at the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles, she saw two people in the crowd wearing the shirt. "I made sure that I hugged them and said, 'Thank you very much,'" she says. "And they were stunned. I don't think they really understood what just happened."

Today, while Tati cannot confirm the total the band have raised – "it's

a lot" – another upload to the band's Instagram confirmed where the money has gone: some to a children's music school in Borodyanka near Kyiv, and some to supporting the treatment and recovery of Natalia, a Mariupol local caught in a shelling of a theatre. Another payment was made to the B.M. Lyatoshynsky Music School of Kharkiv, following bombing that saw many of its instruments destroyed. "We got this big expensive piano, and it was hard to transport it from Kyiv," says Tati. "Kharkiv was being bombed every single day. There was not one day when it was completely calm."

Current law in Ukraine dictates that men between the ages of 18 and 60 cannot leave the country, except under strict exemptions. However, in June the band announced they had been granted permission by the Ukrainian Ministry Of Culture to head back out



"Slava Ukraini!"



on the road as ambassadors for their home country.

They were finally able to join Slipknot, playing to packed arenas, before months of summer festivals – each show an opportunity to raise further funds and awareness of the war back home. Everywhere they went, Tati says, they were welcomed by huge, fiercely supportive crowds. “There were a lot of flags,” she says. “Since we had come to Europe last minute, we couldn’t grab our own, so we asked people from the first row to hand us a flag to take a picture with it. Then we would sign it and give it back.”

As we speak, Jinjer are winding down from a US headline run with P.O.D, Vended, Malevolence and fellow Ukrainians Space Of Variations, who have also been given government permission to travel. Next year, they’ll head off again with Bullet For My Valentine and Atreyu in the UK, and

“WE’RE NOT GOING TO GIVE UP”

TATIANA SHMAYLUK

while the band are overjoyed to be back on the road, doing what they do best, Tati says she has come to see touring in a different light: a chance not just to win the hearts and minds of metalheads with their belligerent fury, it is her “responsibility” to remind people that the war is far from over.

“Search for a reliable organisation that collects humanitarian aid for Ukraine,” is her advice for anyone who wants to pledge support. “If you live in a country where there are a lot of Ukrainian refugees, please help them physically; you can volunteer, donate food and clothes...”

Due to the pandemic and the war, Tati has not been able to see her family since 2019. Although her parents are able to make contact over Zoom from their home in Donetsk, she has no idea when she might be able to see them again. For that reason, she will never stop fighting.

“I know there’s a lot of shit going on in the world, and people tend to forget what’s going on,” she says of the conflict. “I don’t know how much we can help with fighting this war from the stage, but at least we can try and help people not to forget. We want to let people know that we’re still alive, Ukraine is still there, and no one’s going to give up.” **H**

BUY THEIR T-SHIRT AT WWW.JINJER-MERCH.COM. JINJER SUPPORT BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE IN THE UK DURING FEBRUARY/MARCH 2023

THE YEAR THAT...

THE WOODSTOCK '99 DOGS BLEW OUR MINDS

Two reports exposed the chaos behind the scenes of the infamously muddy shitshow

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

We've long known that Woodstock '99 was a mud-soaked disaster, but this was the year the skeletons came tumbling out of its closet, due to two documentaries. HBO Max's film *Woodstock 99: Peace, Love, And Rage* and Netflix's mini series, *Trainwreck: Woodstock '99*, featured a similar mix of artists, organisers and concertgoers, but although they both came to the conclusion the festival was a mess, they seemed to arrive at different reasons as to why.

"I've seen both of them. One is fucking ridiculous," snorts Korn's Jonathan Davis, who appeared in each, talking about Korn's legendary performance on the first night of the festival. "The first one is just trying to pin everything on angsty white boys. It's ridiculous! If you were there, you'd know it was a trainwreck, just like the name of the second one."

Woodstock '99 was meant to be the definitive live music event of the late 90s, with Korn joined by a mouthwatering array of talent such as Metallica, Megadeth, Rage Against The Machine, Limp Bizkit and... er... Insane Clown Posse, but it ended in

riots and destruction. Other than the odd piece of news footage, the details had remained buried – until now. The films outlined the poor decision-making that led to punters burning down and even looting the festival.

"They just wanted to cut corners," shrugs Jonathan. "And I loved how, on the Netflix documentary, they showed how they were cutting corners. 'We're not going to have this security, we're not going to bother with this...'. They needed to make a profit, and they did everything just to make a profit. They didn't care about getting food or water or sanitation. Of course, people were going to get angry!"

Much of the ire from viewers was directed at promoter John Scher, who appeared in *Trainwreck*. Two decades on, it appeared he refused to take responsibility for a festival that ended in arson, multiple sexual assaults and even the death of three concertgoers. Instead, he pins the blame on Limp Bizkit's Fred Durst for inciting a riot.

"It's that 'Devil made me do it' defence! Blame the heavy bands," Jonathan says. "I hate, I really hate, how they just tried to blame everything

"THEY TRIED TO BLAME THE ROCK BANDS"

JONATHAN DAVIS

on the rock bands. They try and blame Limp Bizkit, but Limp Bizkit just played their show as they always do."

Jonathan welcomes the films for shining a spotlight on the festival, and sees them as an opportunity to draw a line under the unrest and tragedy that plagued it. Before it descended into chaos, Korn had enjoyed one of the biggest moments of their career.

"I'm glad they made those documentaries so that people can see how it really went down and we can walk away from it," Jonathan says. "Everyone always had an opinion on what went wrong. I'm not going to talk shit on anybody, but I want to remember the feeling I felt stood on that stage. It was the most incredible feeling I've ever had when I said, 'Are you ready?!' I've never felt that since, and I keep chasing that dragon." **H**

THE YEAR THAT...

NU GEN ROSE UP

Female and non-binary artists dominated an inclusive new scene that fucked with genres to thrilling effect

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT

Now and again, a scene comes along that defies everything we know about heavy music. In 2022, we were amazed to discover a generation of singer-songwriters who were blending industrial, trap, punk, nu metal and more in a Doc Martin-booted kick to convention, challenging gatekeepers and promoting inclusivity. In May, we coined a name for it: nu gen.

For the most part, nu gen is made up of female or non-binary solo artists who are hellbent on carving out their own space. Some of the frontrunners in the UK include 'ugly pop' pioneer Zand, 'doom trap' hellraiser Mimi Barks, the hyper-pop-influenced Bambie Thug, and AlienBlaze – newly signed to Poppy's label, Sumerian. Stateside, LA's Lilith Czar is on the same label, plus there's Roadrunner artist Dana Dentata, the gothic Mothica, the screamo-electro Siickbrain, and rappers Lil Lotus and Nascar Aloe.

Nu gen artist Cassyette hybridises rock, emo and pop into what she's dubbed 'grit pop' – a sound that's catapulted her to the forefront of the movement and opened up massive opportunities, such as supporting My Chemical Romance on their reunion tour and playing Download. "I've had no sleep, but it's been a great year!" she says.

When we spoke to Cassyette in May, she pointed out that the nu gen scene had been "bubbling under the surface for a while". Of whether she's seen the genre increase in popularity, she says: "It's great to see how many nu gen artists have been playing such cool live events, selling out their shows. It feels like a really solid community."

An important part of nu gen is self-identity, which is why no two artists are alike. It's all about owning who you are, shining a light on uglier truths and discussing topics that might make others uncomfortable, such as mental health. "It feels like people are angrier than ever and forming into subcultures with something important to say," adds Cassyette. "It feels like the music has a backbone."

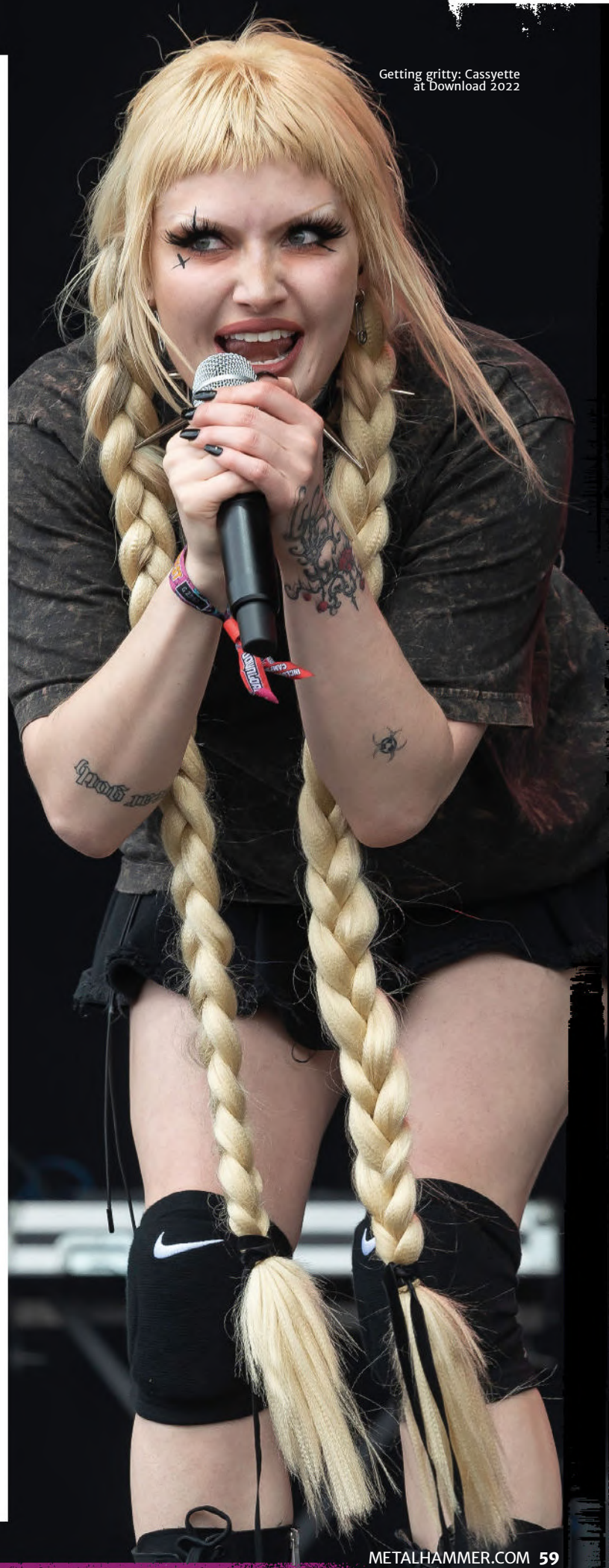
Part of this is about being proud of how you look, dress and identify, which is why its alt culture aesthetic is important too. It's a post-apocalyptic, sci-fi mash-up of mullets, make-up, dyed hair, fetishwear and tattoos. "There is not one way people in the nu gen community dress or act," Cassyette explains. "Everyone is picking their favourite parts and forming their own thing. I think this is making people their true, authentic self. You can wear what you want, express yourself the way you want."

In a scene that's not dominated by cis men, there's an overriding feeling of acceptance no matter who you are, or what music you like. "You can see that there are many genres crossing over or blending together, giving people a really good chance to be themselves and not having to deal with gatekeeping," says Cassyette. "This is really nice to see."

Nu gen is only just beginning, and as Cassyette explains, it's an exciting time to be a fan of heavy music. "There are so many great artists on the scene. Some take inspiration from the past, some from the present, and nu gen really could go anywhere. I'm here for it!" ■

CASSYETTE'S SAD GIRL MIXTAPE IS OUT VIA DEVIL LAND

Getting gritty: Cassyette at Download 2022



THE YEAR THAT...

RAMMSTEIN DROPPED THEIR PANDEMIC RECORD

After previously leaving a decade between albums, *Zeit* was a welcome and much-needed surprise

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

After waiting 10 years for a new Rammstein album, 2019's *Untitled* offering was gratefully and rapturously received. Imagine our joy, then, when in June 2020 drummer Christoph Schneider confirmed the German sextet were already working on new material. In October, they posted a photo of themselves at work at La Fabrique Studios in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, France, with the caption: 'Sadly no tour this year – but it's great to be back in the studio!' Our hopes were aflame.

In March 2021, keyboardist Flake Lorenz confirmed it: we were getting a new, full-length Rammstein record. "The fact we couldn't perform live increased our creativity," he told Motor.de. "We had more time to think of new things and less distraction. As a result, we recorded an album that we hadn't planned on."

The news helped soften the blow that they would be postponing their Europe Stadium Tour (again), to 2022.

And so, to this year. On March 8, they posted teaser videos with the hashtag #ZEITkommt (*Zeit Is Coming*), and the world lost its shit. Two days later, they dropped the album's title track, *Zeit* (Time), along with a moving, cinematic video that featured cloaked figures, a baby going back into its mother's vagina, and the band covered in the sands of an hourglass. More than 40,000 fans watched the premiere of

their epic, existential ballad – but some wondered whether Rammstein were hinting at their own demise.

"*Zeit* isn't about getting older, so much as it's a contemplation of time itself. The idea isn't that things are ending," clarified video director Robert Gwisdek. "Rather, that things progress through the river of time and there is no ending, just different stages."

On March 29, they launched a competition for fans to discover 11 'Zeit Capsules,' hidden in different locations around the world. Each capsule revealed the name of a track. One was the upbeat *Zick Zack*, released as a single the following week and accompanied by another eye-catching video, this one lambasting contemporary beauty ideals as the glammed-up band performed in grotesque masks. A CD version came with a spoof teen magazine.

After all that build-up, *Zeit* was released on April 29, along with another single, the riff-driven *Angst* ('Fear'). Its lyrics spoke of children being taught to fear a figure called the 'black man' if they misbehaved, and then unwittingly and collectively carrying that fear with them into adulthood. We asked Karen Leeder, Oxford Professor of Modern German Literature, to explain it for us.

"The starting point is the family, the father threatening the naughty child with the 'black man' or bogey man," she said. "But we soon see countries and peoples arming themselves against what they don't understand and thus fear. A powerful chorus challenges idle scapegoating: 'Who is afraid of the bogey man?'."

Zeit demonstrated the best of Rammstein; it was

political, observational, challenging, darkly funny, sometimes crude, and littered with subtle references to German cultural icons such as playwright Bertolt Brecht and poet Goethe. Closer *Adieu* was a grand, sweeping ballad about death, again featuring multiple layers of meaning. Karen noted that "the phrase '*Jeder stirbt für sich allein*' ('Everyone dies alone') is a watchword, but also a novel of anti-fascist resistance by the German author Hans Fallada. But in tune with the first song [*Armee der Tristen*, translation 'Army Of The Dreary'], *Adieu* offers a community in death: 'We will stand by you' and later 'you will always be with us'."

It was a sombre yet stirring note to close on. "The trauma of these last couple of years doesn't seem to have been lost on Rammstein," said our reviewer, Stephen Hill, "with much of the record showing these larger-than-life, fire-breathing German superstars in a more contemplative mood, often expressing an acute awareness of the fragility of life and their own mortality." They still had an oompah-led song called *Dicke Titten* ('Big Tits'), mind.

Come May, the pyromaniacs finally embarked on their postponed Europe Stadium Tour, beginning in Prague. Rather than opening with *Was ich liebe* as they had on the *Untitled* run, they played newie *Armee der Tristen*, the rallying cry 'Komm mit' ('come along') ringing out as their now-familiar plumes of noxious smoke emanated from the stage and towers in the crowd. That was followed by *Zick Zack*, with *Zeit* and *Adieu* later in the setlist. There were no new stunts for the songs, but none were needed. According to the *Coventry Telegraph*,

"WE HAD MORE
TIME TO THINK
OF NEW THINGS"

FLAKE LORENZ

Rammstein were not resting on their laurels during the pandemic



Rammstein's show on June 26 at the CBS Arena was so loud, it could be heard more than 10 miles away.

Next summer, Rammstein will bring that Stadium Tour back to Europe (although sadly, they're bypassing the UK). The dates sold swiftly, prompting Rammstein to file a restraining order against secondary ticketing platform Viagogo, legally forbidding the company from reselling tickets. Yet another reason to love this mighty yet empathetic band.

Earlier in the year, Till Lindemann was seen helping Ukrainian refugees in Berlin, and the band issued a

statement in support of the country. "The band Rammstein wishes to express its support for the nation of Ukraine as it resists the shocking attack perpetrated by the Russian government," it said. "Above all at this moment, we feel particular grief for the suffering of the Ukrainian people... We acknowledge the desperation that many Russian fans may feel when faced with the actions of their government, and we want to remember the humanity shared by both Russian and Ukrainian citizens."

Some might have been surprised by all Rammstein did and stood for

in 2022, but not video director Robert Gwisdek. "Rammstein are still evolving," he told us. "They're not like other huge, old bands that are doing the same things they did 20, 30 years ago. They have an edge and are still expanding. People think they know Rammstein because of videos like *Pussy* or *Deutschland*, but then they'll do something like surfing in a tiny boat while waving an LGBTQ+ flag. They aren't being left behind by the times, they've turned towards progress." **H**

ZEIT IS OUT NOW VIA UNIVERSAL



THE YEAR THAT...

MEAT LOAF PASSED AWAY

He was a charismatic icon of stage and screen who seemed indestructible. Son-in-law and Anthrax man Scott Ian pays tribute

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER

In January, Michael Lee Aday passed away at the age of 74. As Meat Loaf, he had released 12 albums as well as appearing in a slew of TV shows and movies over the years, including *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Wayne's World* and *Fight Club*.

Anthrax guitarist Scott Ian was 13 years old when Meat Loaf's debut album, *Bat Out Of Hell*, came out in 1977. A year later, he saw him live in New York, the singer's charismatic energy and epic grandiosity blowing his young mind. Two decades after that, Scott started dating Meat's daughter, Pearl, and they were married in 2011. He recalls the monumental work ethic and resilience of his showbiz father-in-law.



Before you met Meat, did you have any expectations?

Scott: "I don't think I had any. I was going to his house to pick up his daughter for a date,

so was very much aware of the pecking order of who was the biggest rock star in the room! I'd been a fan all my life, so I was nervous. I'd have felt nervous if it was any dad whose daughter I was picking up, let alone his! But he knew how that moment was going to go down, which was basically: stare at me across the room, nod and walk away!"

What was the greatest lesson you learned from him?

Scott: "I was lucky to spend a lot of time on tour with him. I was 20 years into my career, in the mindset of, 'I know how to do this.' But I realised there was so much more to learn about entertaining. Watching him bring it live with an intensity that was even greater than I saw in 1978: the fact that he was doing that 25 years later gave me such a huge kick in the ass."

Which Meat Loaf deep cut would you recommend seeking out?

Scott: "I've been listening to *For Crying Out Loud* from *Bat Out Of Hell* a lot lately.

When I got that record as a kid, I didn't care about ballads, I just wanted the rock songs! But we had a memorial in LA and Jay Buchanan from Rival Sons sang it on piano; a mind-blowing performance of such a brilliant song. In a way it feels like a lost song, like I'd never listened to it before. I was able to appreciate how brilliant it is."

Meat had many health issues. When he fell ill for the last time, did you expect him to come through it?

Scott: "Whenever he had a health thing I'd be concerned of course, but never worried, because I always knew a month later we'd be hearing about plans for the next record: 'Oh look, the next tour is booked, everything is OK!' I'm not making light of the fact that

"HE WAS SUCH A POWERFUL MAN"

SCOTT IAN

he really did hurt himself sometimes – he took some nasty falls, he had issues with his voice – but he always found a way through it. He was such a powerful man, I honestly never thought anything would stop him."

How would you like to sum up Meat Loaf's legacy?

Scott: "He left it all on the stage, is the best way to put it. We all miss him, and we know there's millions and millions of people around the world who miss him too. It's just a huge loss." **H**

Rest in peace, Meat

Demi and Nita onstage at Hard Rock Sacramento on September 22

THE YEAR THAT...

NITA STRAUSS TEAMED UP WITH DEMI LOVATO

Following eight years on tour with shock rocker Alice Cooper, the guitarist jumped ship for... a former Disney star?

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

In July, guitarist Nita Strauss caused a stir when she announced that, after eight years with Alice Cooper's band, she wouldn't be playing with them on their autumn tour. The reason? She was going to join forces with pop powerhouse Demi Lovato, who was finally embracing their lifelong love of rock, metal and punk.

"It's an interesting thing that everyone's picked up, saying it's a 'departure' [from Alice], but I don't feel necessarily that I left," Nita told *Hammer* in the aftermath of the news breaking. "I'm so grateful for the time I had playing with Alice, and if that time comes again, I'll be so grateful to go back and play with him some more."

During her stint as The Coop's sidekick, Nita established herself as one of modern rock's most influential guitar heroes, and in 2018 she became Ibanez's first female signature artist. In January, thanks to her song *Dead Inside* (featuring vocals from

Disturbed's David Draiman), she became the first female solo artist in more than three decades to hit No.1 on Billboard's Mainstream Rock Airplay chart. Considering her success, it's not surprising she caught the attention of edgy popstar Demi Lovato.

Demi has long spoken about her love of metal, listing Lamb Of God, Dimmu Borgir and Job For A Cowboy as some of her favourite bands. On new album *Holy Fvck*, she turns to the power of heavy music to express her struggles with substance abuse, trauma and mental health. To help tell

her story, she wanted to put together an all-female live band, and when she asked Nita to join, the answer was a resounding yes.

"Demi is one of the biggest stars in the whole world, and she wants to take a step into our genre and the style of music we love so much," explained Nita.

"How do you say no? How do you turn down this opportunity to bring this style of music to so many more people?"

Nita has since toured alongside Demi, appearing on both *Jimmy Fallon* and *Jimmy Kimmel* and in a series of Vevo live performance videos. In conversation with *Hammer*, she described herself as the Slash to Demi's Axl Rose, and likened the situation to her own formative experiences seeing videos of the "badass, beautiful blonde" Jennifer Batten onstage with Michael Jackson, a role model due to her "incredible showmanship and impeccable technique". Decades later, Nita's ready to be that figure for the generation of young, eager pop fans.

"If I could give that experience with this next generation of fans, that will then go, 'Hey, I want to go out and play guitar. I want a guitar for Christmas instead of a videogame console'... that's what it's all about in the end." **H**

NITA'S SECOND SOLO STUDIO ALBUM IS DUE IN 2023

"I WANT TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION"

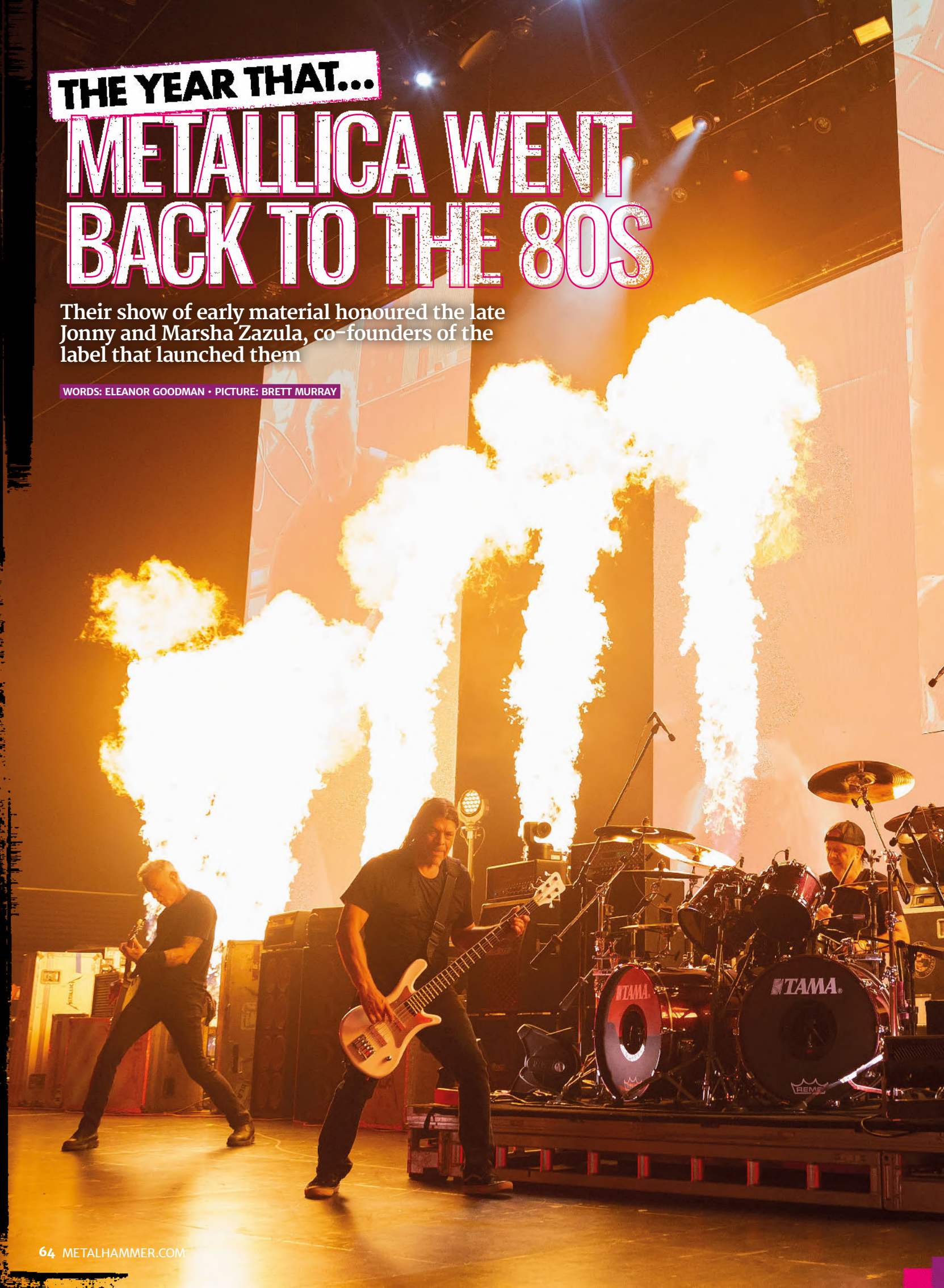
NITA STRAUSS

THE YEAR THAT...

METALLICA WENT BACK TO THE 80S

Their show of early material honoured the late Jonny and Marsha Zazula, co-founders of the label that launched them

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURE: BRETT MURRAY





Metallica with Jon and Marsha's daughters, Danielle Zazula, Rikki Zazula and Blaire Brewer

For old-school thrash fans, it was a dream come true. On November 6, at Hard Rock Live in Florida, Metallica played a set exclusively featuring songs from their first two albums, 1983's *Kill 'Em All* and 1984's *Ride The Lightning*. Both were originally released on the label Megaforce, co-founded by Jonny and Marsha Zazula. Jonny passed away in February, following Marsha's death in January 2021.

The gig was a tribute to the Zazulas, who had believed in the young Metallica enough to form Megaforce in 1982. Kicking off with *Creeping Death* and *Ride The Lightning*, it called back to an era when thrash was the most thrilling scene around. The 16-song set also included *No Remorse*, *Phantom Lord*, *Motorbreath*, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, *Seek & Destroy*, *Fade To Black* and closer *Hit The Lights*, as well as covers of *Diamond Head's Am I Evil?* and *Blitzkrieg's Blitzkrieg*. The band were supported by British rockers Raven, who were also signed to Megaforce.

"The vibe of the show took me right back to 1982, seeing the band onstage at L'Amour in Brooklyn," smiles Maria Ferrero, who was Megaforce's publicist/A&R in those early days.

Jonny was Metallica's first manager, and Megaforce went on to release albums by Anthrax, Testament, Overkill, King's X and more. A portion of the proceeds from the night were donated to charity MusiCares, in the Zazulas' name.

"Jon and Marsha founded heavy metal in America," says Maria. "We needed a kick in the pants! All we had was the NWOBHM, and they stuck their necks out on the line to introduce the world to Metallica. None of us would be here without Jon and Marsha or Metallica. None of us!"

Next year, Metallica will headline two nights at Download. But what of new music? It's been six years since the release of *Hardwired... To Self-Destruct*. In summer, Kirk Hammett hinted they had used the pandemic downtime to work on a follow-up.

"Let's just say that over the Covid years, we weren't just sitting around on the couch texting each other, complaining about how we couldn't work," he said. "That was the exact opposite of what happened! We've been working through the lost year – so you can draw your own conclusions from that!"

We conclude that it's time to get excited... ■

METALLICA HEADLINE TWO NIGHTS AT DOWNLOAD 2023

**"JON AND MARSHA
FOUNDED HEAVY
METAL IN AMERICA"**

MARIA FERRERO, FORMER MEGAFORCE PUBLICIST/A&R

THE 50 BEST ALBUMS OF 2022

FOR ALL OUR
CONTRIBUTORS'
INDIVIDUAL LISTS,
HEAD TO
METALHAMMER.COM

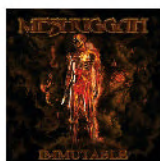
Our critics chose their favourite albums of the year, and we crunched them into one definitive mega-list. Horns up!

WORDS: ADAM BRENNAN, ALEC CHILLINGWORTH, JOE DALY, REMFRY DEDMAN, ALEX DELLER, SPENCER GRADY, STEPHEN HILL, RICH HOBSON, DOM LAWSON, DANNII LEIVERS, SOPHIE MAUGHAN, EDWIN MCFEE, MATT MILLS, TOM O'BOYLE, JONATHAN SELZER, KEVIN STEWART-PANKO, PAUL TRAVERS, KEZ WHELAN

50 MESHUGGAH

Immutable

ATOMIC FIRE



Immutable played with Meshuggah's long-established, peerless sound, from Tomas Haake's percussive persistence and Fredrik

Thordendal's dial-up-connection solos to Jens Kidman's mecha-rasp. Each track was a smouldering exploration of concept, adding more flesh to an increasingly organic sound driven by the remorseless mechanism concealed within. With genre-inventing and defining records in their rear-view mirror, this melding of man and machine ploughed ever forward.

49 DARKHER

The Buried Storm

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS



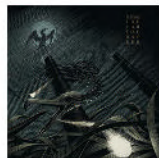
For all the drones and hide drums that have followed in Wardruna's wake, this year's most potent summoning of that 'solemn space'

came from the north of England. Steeped in folk's ageless undercurrents and a sense of slowly percolating awe, the second album from Jayn Maiven, aka Darkher, was akin to the lament of a sole, ghost ship inhabitant, drifting into a state of abandoned grace. A journey between ungaugable marker points, *The Buried Storm* left a deep, indelible mark.

48 JO QUAIL

The Cartographer

BY NORSE MUSIC



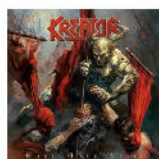
A cellist whose next-level musicianship has made her an in-demand artist in the metal scene, Jo Quail's knack for weaving the

most organic and enrapturing of spells took on new dimensions with *The Cartographer*. Commissioned by Roadburn festival, this was a five-movement suite that, like Darkher, had an adrift-at-sea aura, but one whose ultimate, ecstatic destination was encoded into every strand. Keeping you on tenterhooks throughout, this was the vast, immersive vision of a true master.

47 KREATOR

Hate Über Alles

NUCLEAR BLAST



Has any thrash band aged more gracefully? Four decades after leading the scene's

Teutonic movement, the Essen aggressors are still walloping their hordes with lightning rhythms and melodeath guitar chops. *Hate Über Alles* wowed once again by scooping in a dollop of power metal, making the choruses of *Midnight Sun* and *Strongest Of The Strong* mighty enough to fold steel. Other songs, like the title track and *Killer Of Jesus*, raged faster than some bands still in their 20s.

46 KORN

Requiem

LOMA VISTA



Anyone wondering what a 'happy' Korn album would sound like got their answer with *Requiem*.

Following 2019's pitch-black *The Nothing*, which found vocalist Jonathan Davis grappling with

grief, on the nu metal veterans' 14th album he turned a corner. While these tracks remained knee-deep in the band's trademark tar-thick grooves, a dash of hope glimmered in the towering *Let The Dark Do The Rest* and *Start The Healing*, resulting in their most nuanced effort to date.

45 FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY

Oh What The Future Holds

NUCLEAR BLAST



Relentlessly crushing and unflinching in its purpose, the New Jersey natives elevated the deathcore genre on their sixth album,

resulting in a modern classic from a band on career-defining form. Encompassing the savage and the serene, the record never fell into repose over its 10 eargasm-worthy tracks. From the expansive grooves of the Gojira-esque *Far From Heaven* and *Pandora's* triple-guitar Gothenburg riffery, to filth-encrusted breakdowns and impassioned screams later on, this was their most explosive work to date.

44 BLOOD COMMAND

Praise Armageddonism

HASSLE



On their fourth album and third vocalist, the future looked wobbly for Norway's deathpop pioneers. *Praise Armageddonism*

smashed any doubts, like Paramore suplexing Refused through Turbonegro's denim dinner table. Ex-Pagan vocalist Nikki Brumen was the missing link, screeching, singing and going 'UGH!' over the band's most anthemic bevy of bangers to date; that *Saturday City* didn't ignite some kind of TikTok twerking trend is baffling. They might have had to nick Nikki from Australia, but Blood Command's gamble paid off.

43 ALEXISONFIRE

Otherness

DINE ALONE



There were many who thought it would never happen, but 2022 was the year Alexisonfire finally returned from the wilderness. The

Canadian post-hardcore legends' first album in 13 years found them on fiery form. From the arty *Sans Soleil* to the breathless, hulking *Dark Night Of The Soul* and sprawling closer *World Stops Turning*, *Otherness* pushed their legacy into brand new dimensions. An incendiary reminder of why we all fell in love with them in the first place.

Life is moving
fast for Heriot

HERIOT

They staked their claim as metal's most exciting new band, and collected achievements as if they were Pokémon

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

Heriot's 2022 reads like a list of career highlights most rising bands would kill for, each one more dizzying than the last. From playing ArcTanGent, Bloodstock and Download festivals in front of packed tents, to touring with luminaries Rolo Tomassi and Zeal & Ardor, and getting props from everyone from Knocked Loose to Architects' Sam Carter and Lamb Of God's Mark Morton, the metallic hardcore quartet – guitarist and vocalist Deb Gough, vocalist and bassist Jake Packer, guitarist Erhan Alman and drummer Julian Gage – have emerged confidently as the breakthrough band of the year.

"I have these weird moments where I'm like, 'Is this really happening?'" laughs Deb, when we read that summary of the last 12 months back to her. Of it all, she credits the band's debut at Download, a festival she's been to every year as a punter since 2011, as her pinch-me moment of the year. "I used to go with my dad and he would always say, 'One day you'll do this, Deb.' And then this year was the year. We could hear a 'HE-RI-OT!' chant before we went on. I felt like I was having a dream or something."

At just eight tracks long, Heriot's debut, *Profound Morality*, is technically an EP, but as a bunch of people on the Hammer payroll voted for it as one

**"DOWNLOAD
WAS LIKE
A DREAM"**

DEB GOUGH

of our albums of the year, we had to include it. Churning together hardcore, industrial, death and doom metal, it immediately set out a new frontier for heavy music – the perfect backdrop for the band to dig into unsettling concepts.

"It's about holding accountability [when it comes] to the bigger picture," explains Deb. "Is there such a thing as a bad person? When things go wrong, how often is it the system? And who's in control of the system?"

It's so expertly put together, you'd never suspect Deb – whose ethereal vocals interject brief flashes of hope into the mix – only started singing two years ago. "It was [during writing sessions for] the song *Profound Morality*," she says, admitting she stepped up to the mic with a reluctance she hasn't quite overcome yet. "This was when everybody was at home during lockdown, and we'd send files to each other over Dropbox, so I wouldn't have to sing in front of the band. Even now, I won't sing clean during soundcheck."

It's something she's going to have to get used to, though, because the venues are only going to get bigger. The quartet are eyeballing a packed schedule for next year, which will see them tour outside the UK for the first time, and while Deb is staying tight-lipped about the sound of Heriot's debut proper, she's adamant we'll hear it in 2023. "We like the ambient bits, and there's other bits that we're thinking of to keep the band fresh," she explains. "But Heriot will never not be a heavy band. That's always going to be the case."

Whichever direction they take, one thing's for sure: with Heriot, the future of metal is in good hands. **H**

42 SABATON *The War To End All Wars*

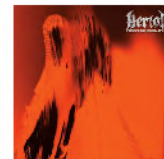
NUCLEAR BLAST



Sabatons made a Sabaton record! Their 10th LP remembered the valour of those who served in WWI (again), backed by the turbo-boosted power metal for which they're known. It's easy to rip the piss out of these cosplaying Swedes, but when they delivered a track like *Christmas Truce*, you couldn't doubt their sincerity. Sodden with synth and steamrolling through choruses Eurovision contestants would give a glittery leg for, this was a triumph.

41 HERIOT *Profound Morality*

CHURCH ROAD



Heriot had the metal world shitting their pants this year. The debut from these Birmingham/Swindon upstarts had everyone from Architects' Sam Carter to LOG's Mark Morton raving. *Profound Morality* was a frighteningly refined effort that saw the band boil down sludge, industrial and metallic hardcore with a swirl of ethereal melody, putting themselves forward as a seriously exciting new noise.

40 PARKWAY DRIVE *Darker Still*

EPITAPH



Such was the tumultuous creation of the Aussies' seventh album that they almost became metal's most high-profile casualty of the pandemic. But having regrouped and relaunched, *Darker Still* went from being a potential epitaph to becoming their most audacious effort. Turning the exuberance of youth into a more refined spectacle without losing an ounce of their spite, *The Greatest Fear*, *Soul Bleach* and the awe-inspiring title track were to be some of the year's most irrepressible anthems.

39 MEGADETH *The Sick, The Dying... And The Dead*

UMC



Years in the making but well worth the wait, Megadeth's 16th album felt like a rebirth. With new drummer Dirk Verbeuren powering things along, songs like *Life In Hell*, *We'll Be Back* and the monumental *Night Stalkers* were as sharp, smart and destructive as anything from the band's early days, and Dave Mustaine hadn't sounded this righteously venomous in years. **▶**

38 ELECTRIC CALLBOY

Tekkno

CENTURY MEDIA



Thumping anthems. Lycra-clad videos. Tongue-in-cheek lyrics. Odes to Elton John. Welcome to *Tekkno*.

A raucous celebration of Europop in all its uber-flamboyant glory, album number six from the German electronicore squad came front-loaded with high-energy singles, entirely unafraid to marry techno and shimmering pop punk with nu metal nuances, blood-curdling howls and blistering breakdowns. Sitting somewhere between the dancefloor and death metal, 99-second cut *Hurrikan* somehow managed to make you throw shapes and fists.

37 SUMERLANDS

Dreamkiller

RELAPSE



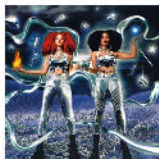
Returning way too long after their killer 2016 debut, Sumerlands surprised us all with a direction change.

Dropping their doomier elements and recruiting the falsetto wail of new vocalist Brendan Radigan, they hit the gym, slathered on baby oil and donned loincloths. This was METAL in the most traditional, melodramatic sense, with genuine heart pumping loudly within. Wanting at times for the harder edge of its predecessor, *Dreamkiller* elevated the band beyond nostalgia, revealing its nuances on repeat listens.

36 NOVA TWINS

Supernova

MARSHALL



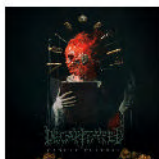
London's dynamic duo established themselves as heavyweights with their knockout second album. *Supernova*

opened pits and minds, and delivered a pigeonhole-bothering, feral fusion of punk, nu metal and grime that set both the metal world and the mainstream alight. As empowering as it was explosive, bombastic anthems like the impossibly catchy *Antagonist* and the patriarchy-prodding *Cleopatra* asserted Amy Love and Georgia South as exciting new voices with plenty to say.

35 DECAPITATED

Cancer Culture

NUCLEAR BLAST



Not content with playing on Machine Head's best record in more than a decade, Vogg pushed *Decapitated* to



Lamb Of God: pissed off and just what we needed

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

GAMES OF THE YEAR

Deadly demons! Magical battle axes! Ninja Turtles!

WORDS: JOSH WEST. FOR MORE GAMES ACTION, SEE GAMESRADAR.COM

METAL: HELLSINGER

What if the *Doom* reboot pushed you to rip and tear demons to the beat of an outrageous, original heavy metal soundtrack, featuring legends such as Randy Blythe, Mikael Stanne and Alissa White-Gluz? You'd get *Metal: Hellsinger*.

ELDEN RING

Elden Ring is beautiful and brutal. This is another must-play from the *Dark Souls* developer, and offers up hundreds of hours

of punishing battles and awe-inspiring open world exploration.

GOD OF WAR RAGNARÖK

Kratos and Atreus return for what is undoubtedly the standout PlayStation 5 game of 2022. It looks stunning, plays fantastically, and features some of the best combat design of the year.

THE QUARRY

The slasher subgenre has inspired many metal bands

over the years, and *The Quarry* casts you as director of your very own horror movie. You choose who lives or dies, one fateful night in the woods.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

Come for the Mike Patton rendition of the classic *TMNT* theme song, stay for the awesome side-scrolling action that'll transport you and your buddies straight back to the 90s.

new heights of ingenious brutality this year. Even by Decapitated's face-removing standards, *Cancer Culture* was precise, violent and gleefully fast-as-fuck. It was also one of the Poles' most diverse efforts, with cameos from Jinjer's Tatiana Shmayluk on the ingenious *Hello Death* and Robb Flynn on *Iconoclast* adding fuel to the exploratory fire. Meanwhile, the 76-second *Locked* simply flayed.

34 LAMB OF GOD

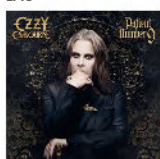
Omens
NUCLEAR BLAST



Lamb Of God's ninth album didn't stray far from the furious, face-meltingly groovy template the band have carved out over the last couple of decades, but that's OK. The Virginian heavyweights at their pissed-off best was just what we needed in 2022. Sure, there were moments of innovation in the hardcore-indebted *Denial Mechanism* and the genre-spanning, pile-driving *September Song*, but elsewhere *Omens* was solid proof that there's plenty of bile-doused gas left in the tank.

33 OZZY OSBOURNE

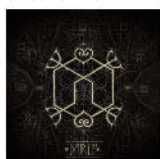
Patient Number 9
EPIC



Given Ozzy's health problems and a decade-long gap since *Scream*, the emergence of a new solo album in 2020 was a wonderful surprise. Ozzy carried that sense of joy and enthusiasm straight into *Patient Number 9*, which was worth celebrating not only because the man is a living legend but because also because it was a bloody great album. The calibre of guests helped – Clapton, Wyld, Iommi, Hawkins et al – but Oz was in fine form himself in terms of both songwriting and vocal delivery.

32 HEILUNG

Drif
SEASON OF MIST



With their third studio album, this enigmatic multinational collective journeyed beyond Europe to explore the tales and rituals of other, further-flung civilisations. What they returned with was rare and transcendental: a deep and compelling piece of work hewn from voice, bones, drums and low-key electronics that flexed, expanded and cohered into something that threatened to unlock a part of ourselves that we've all but forgotten how to use. Music for those open to new sounds, ideas and experiences, in a nutshell.

Nova Twins spent 2022 putting the boot into barriers



NOVA TWINS

The incendiary duo smashed the barriers between rock and the mainstream, and won a bunch of celebrity fans

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

Playing Glastonbury, getting nominated for the Mercury Prize, hitting the UK Top 40... Nova Twins have spent the best part of 2022 smashing through the barriers facing heavy bands.

Alongside the release of their second album, *Supernova*, the genre-bending London punk duo have found themselves getting the kind of mainstream attention they never expected but knew they deserved.

"We've always seen ourselves as the underdog," explains guitarist/vocalist Amy Love. "There was a lot of kickback when we first came out. People weren't getting it. We didn't look like riot girls, whatever that meant. So they didn't include us in that scene, they didn't include us in any scene, we didn't fit anywhere. We would just dream really big and be like, 'We're going to get a Mercury one day.' We had to think that big..."

"...Because everyone thought that we wouldn't," finishes bassist Georgia South.

That was, until everything changed. After *Supernova* was released in June, Nova Twins found themselves at No.1 on the UK Rock & Metal charts, and No.27 in the Top 40. Soon after, this was followed by a call from the Mercurys.

"We lost our heads [to the Mercury nomination]," enthuses Amy. "It was such a bucket list thing – especially for a band like us who wouldn't necessarily be considered for awards like that."

"WE SEE OURSELVES AS THE UNDERDOG"

AMY LOVE

Nova Twins were shortlisted for the prestigious industry award alongside Harry Styles, Sam Fender and Little Simz – an astounding achievement for such a riotous band. The latter would scoop the prize, but at the ceremony Nova Twins got to bring their fierce style and infectious energy to the stage.

"We felt quite proud to be there, like, 'We are representing for the scene. The scene does exist, and we're going to go in as large as we can to show people that there's more types of music that can be put on this platform,'" explains Georgia.

"We were also representing Black women in rock and women in rock," adds Amy. "So we were like, 'Let's make sure we go out there and make everyone proud.' It wasn't a pressure, it was more like an honour."

This year, Nova Twins have taken their energy across the world, including three massive sets at Glastonbury. "We're a touring band, we're a live band. We started on the stage, we didn't think about records, we were just like, 'Let's play live,'" explains Amy.

It's helped them grow their fanbase – not least among celebrities. They recently revealed that Lizzo was on their guestlist for an American show. They also tell *Hammer* that Miguel and Lenny Kravitz rank among their fans, as well as groundbreaking pop icon Kim Petras.

Next year, we can expect more of the same. "I think we're going to be writing loads and touring," says Georgia. "We've got our UK tour, a European tour, we're going back to America, festivals, recording... watch this space!"

We will, because we reckon Nova Twins are about to explode. **H**

31 LORNA SHORE

Pain Remains

CENTURY MEDIA



From an uncertain future to consistently sold-out venues and viral hysteria over new frontman Will Ramos's pig squeals on TikTok, *Pain Remains* legitimised Lorna Shore's status as deathcore's most-wanted band. At just over an hour, and hellacious from the jump-off, the five-piece mined the very depths of their blackened souls as skull-rattling subdrops intertwined with sumptuous, orchestral-led atmospherics. Brutal and beautiful to boot, this vital fourth album not only justified the accompanying fan hype, it exceeded it.

Lorna Shore:
deathcore darlings

LORNA SHORE

With charismatic frontman Will Ramos and an epic symphonic sound that crushed the competition, they became deathcore's breakout stars

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

In the bowels of 2021, Lorna Shore's comically brutal *To The Hellfire* set TikTok aflame, earning the US deathcore band millions of streams and sold-out shows. "It definitely opened people's eyes to everything else we have going on," says vocalist Will Ramos, who joined the band last year on the *...And I Return To Nothingness* EP, from which *...Hellfire* came. "For every normie who doesn't wanna listen to the snortin', we now have all the metal guys. It's more attention than we've ever had."

Formed 12 years ago, the New Jersey band have veered in an increasingly symphonic, maximalist-by-way-of-Dimmu-Borgir direction under the hand of chief songwriter and guitarist, Adam De Micco. Like Napalm Death, no founding members remain – Adam's been there pretty much from the start, though – and the line-up's changed more often than Tobias Forge's wardrobe during a Ghost show. However, Lorna Shore's creative juices really started flowing once their initial recruits left. In 2014, the band struck gold when their song *Life Of Fear*, from the *Bone Kingdom* EP, went viral in an unlikely YouTube video: *Heavy Metal Cats*.

"Everyone was going, 'I love *Bone Kingdom*!' and I was like, 'You're all liars, 'cause when it was out, we played [*Life Of Fear*] and nobody liked it,'" says Adam. "You literally didn't hear that until *Heavy Metal Cats*. That definitely brought people to the band!"

Lorna Shore haven't had it easy, though. Following their second album, *Flesh Coffin*, longtime vocalist Tom Barber abandoned ship to front deathcore heavyweights Chelsea Grin. "That just hurt," Adam admits.

The shit sandwich spread its chunky loaves further. Replacing Tom as frontman in 2018 was CJ McCreery, who recorded the *Immortal* album, but was fired the following year. Almost immediately after the announcement, allegations of sexual misconduct and mental abuse were levelled against CJ – all of which he denies. Adam insists the frontman's dismissal had

nothing to do with his actions outside the band, though.

"A lot of that stuff came about after [CJ's exit] was announced," says Adam – a claim that has been backed up by the vocalist's accusers. "It was going to happen anyway. We weren't getting along. He said he was looking to quit in 2020."

Down a vocalist just before *Immortal*'s release, Lorna Shore scrambled to find a fill-in. Enter Will Ramos, formerly of A Wake In Providence and Monument Of A Memory. Their chemistry was electric, leading to a full-time role for Will and a trip to the studio to record the *...And I Return To Nothingness* EP.

"Yeah, right, I'm gonna be in the band for a week..." Will remembers thinking. "I just leave it to my man Adam over here, I do a little 'bwee bwee bweeee' on top of it, and people seem to love it."

"I WANNA MAKE PEOPLE CRY AND PUNCH EACH OTHER"

WILL RAMOS

"We did the EP to figure out if this would work," Adam adds. "We gave Will some songs that could be his own. At the time, the suggestion was for him to re-record some songs, which would have just set him up to fail. All people would do is compare notes, and that's not productive."

To *The Hellfire* established Lorna Shore as deathcore's hot ticket.

Eager to capitalise on their popularity boost, they started tracking a full-length with Will. But as this wasn't their first rodeo, Adam was cautious about the notion of galloping into the sunset.

"Part of me kept thinking, 'What if the best is behind us?'" he says. "When we did the record, we didn't have anything [properly written]. I had no idea. [The TikTok exposure] may

get people in the door, but it doesn't keep them there."

Thankfully, album number four slapped. *Pain Remains* was a sprawling, hour-plus odyssey featuring the most startling abuse of melody since Anaal Nathrakh's *Endarkenment*. Obscenely intense, epic, catchy and worth every inch of hype, this went further than bands such as Shadow Of Intent and Brand Of Sacrifice. Think more Fleshgod Apocalypse arm-wrestling Cattle Decapitation.

"Everyone just wants to punch each other in the head all the time, which is cool," says Will about the lead single, *Sun/Eater*. "But I want to put a little melody in. People listen to it and they're like, 'I wanna cry.' I wanna make people cry and punch each other in the head."

A 20-minute, three-song conceptual suite closed the record and didn't feel like a stretch. It's bombastic, savage music that thrived just as well supporting Parkway Drive in arenas as headlining clubs over Aborted. Lorna Shore had arrived, but not without incident. The gruelling cycle took its toll, drummer Austin Archey sitting out recent dates to deal with a herniated disc.

"He's found it hard to take the time to take care of his stuff,"

Adam explains. "The workload has been a lot. Just trying to have a life has been hard. It's a good challenge compared to the stagnation of 2020, but the work was just overwhelming."

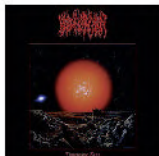
Planning to decompress for the first few months of 2023, Lorna Shore will then take their bucket of breakdowns, symphonics and grunty animal noises across the globe. Despite the band's revolving door – only Adam and Austin have been around longer than 2019 – its longest-serving member believes this is the line-up.

"This is everything I've wanted the band to be," says Adam. "Everyone prioritises this – that's the one thing I felt was missing over the years, and why members came and went."

"A lot of bands don't hang out – they just do what they do," Will finishes. "But everybody's on the same page and everybody loves each other." ▶

30 BLOOD INCANTATION

CENTURY MEDIA



Following 2019's most hyped death metal album with an entirely ambient record was a ballsy move, but Blood Incantation pulled it off in style. Owing more to Tangerine Dream than Morbid Angel, the two lengthy, hypnotic pieces that comprised *Timewave Zero* still had this Denver's quartet's distinctive melodic sensibility and idiosyncratic songwriting style all over them, revealing new layers with each spin. Don't write this off as a self-indulgent peripheral release: it was an essential pit stop on the band's cosmic voyage.

29 GGGOLDDD

ARTOFFACT



Glowering and all-consuming, *This Shame Should Not Be Mine* effortlessly combined post-punk, post-rock, darkwave and the ineffable industrialisation of Swans and Coil. It was as artful and inventive we'd come to expect from this Dutch act, but also one of the most intense and challenging albums you're likely to encounter. Singer Milena Eva addressed the trauma of her rape as a teenager in a manner that was coruscatingly direct and unflinchingly confrontational, making for an album of rare and tremendous power.

28 OCEANS OF SLUMBER

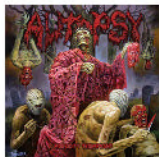
CENTURY MEDIA



A sideways step that made perfect sense, *Starlight And Ash* shrugged off much of Oceans of Slumber's extreme metal baggage and plunged deep into bruised, gothic Americana. The Texans' fifth album was a darkly progressive feast of raw, emotional songwriting. With Cammie Beverly's mesmerising vocal performance as a riveting focal point, songs like *The Waters Rising*, *The Hanging Tree* and a startling cover of *House Of The Rising Sun* were the addictive first fruits of a glorious reinvention.

27 AUTOPSY

PEACEVILLE



There were some fears that the last couple of (still killer) Autopsy albums in 2014 and 2015 had polished a few too many rough

Oceans Of Slumber have taken a spectacular sidestep



edges off the Oakland death metal pioneers' signature ragged and rotten caveman filth. On their first LP for seven years, however, Autopsy's rough edges were once again jagged enough to draw blood, the solos and (gasp) melodies exuded a queasy dissonance, and an evil miasma of fetid green smoke belched from the grooves.

26 BLEED FROM WITHIN

NUCLEAR BLAST



Since emerging from a four-year hiatus in 2018, Bleed From Within had been happily standing toe to toe with fellow UK metalcore heavy-hitters While She Sleeps and Bury Tomorrow. *Shrine* went beyond even that. Tapping into the same rarefied air as *All Our Gods Have Abandoned Us* and

Sempiternal, this was a scene-making achievement that should serve as a watermark of quality for years to come. Bangers like *I Am Damnation*, *Levitate* and *Flesh And Stone* left just about everyone chewing their dust.

25 RUSSIAN CIRCLES

SARGENT HOUSE



The Windy City all-instrumental specialists punched in with their heaviest and grittiest outing yet. A dauntless avalanche of a record, *Gnosis* messed with the classic post-rock quiet-loud-quiet dynamic, ratcheting up to near-black metal levels of intensity, with some passages more *Mgła* than *Mogwai*. Kurt Ballou lent his unmistakable production to the power trio's seamless flux of gargantuan riffs and crystalline arpeggios, all bound in a blissful lustre that wordlessly conjured an approaching world-ending cataclysm. ▶

PRESS/THE HEAVY GLOW/JAME LACOMBE

EPs OF THE YEAR

The small-scale releases with the biggest impact

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL, DOM LAWSON, DANNII LEIVERS, JONATHAN SELZER

COMA HOLE

Coma Hole
This Philly duo's debut EP proved an exploratory blues and fuzz-ridden wonder. An in-the-moment rubbernecker's nirvana and a far-sighted trawl, it was the start of an immersive individual journey.

IRIST

Gloria
Irist's move towards a more expansive groove metal sound was expertly realised across

these five songs. *Gloria* still kept the pummelling heft, but the more progressive elements made this one of 2022's most brilliantly sweeping EPs.

SPIRITBOX

Rotoscope
Nu metal drops. An industrial endorphin rush. Nineties alt pop hooks that channelled Shirley Manson. Here, Spiritbox took their sound in an unexpected direction. A tantalising taster of what's to come.

VIO-LENCE

Let The World Burn
Twenty-nine years after their last album, Vio-Lence roared back into action with a five-song Bay Area beatdown, led by Sean Killian's classic crossover yelp.

ZETRA

From Without
The UK duo drew on everyone from Type O Negative to Siouxsie And The Banshees, Bathory to Bauhaus. It was a fantastically gothy cocktail.

For the stories behind the best albums and
the bands that produced them...

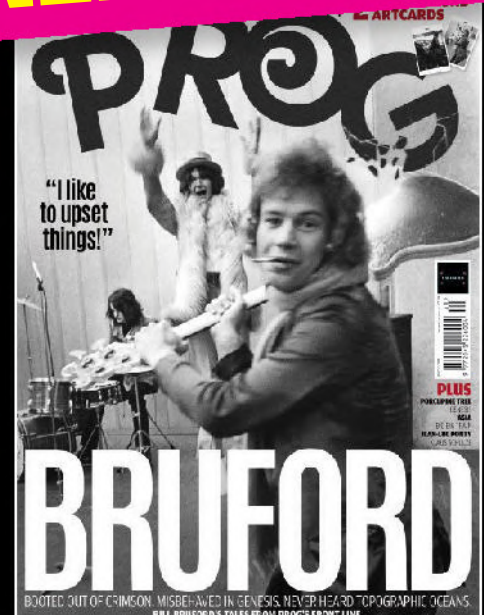
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Coheed And Cambria unleashed more prog metal majesty

24 HEALTH

Disco4 :: Part II

LOMA VISTA



Ex-noise mongers Health had been taking an increasingly hostile approach to genre boundaries ever since 2015's *Death Magic*,

and with their latest effort, they finally severed the limb. Like the star-studded VIP bar in Freddy Krueger's boiler room, *Disco4 :: Part II* saw Nine Inch Nails, Poppy and Lamb Of God drop in for a romp between rap, metal and dark pop, yet Health's gleaming industrialism ensured this felt less a compilation, more a party with one hell of a guestlist.

23 IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT

Spirit Of Ecstasy

CENTURY MEDIA



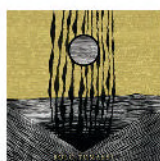
Following 2020's landmark *Alphaville* was never going to be easy, but New York's avant-garde, Art Deco monstrosity rose to the

challenge with a bon vivant relish that bordered on the blasphemous. Shattering death metal's parameters like so many sparkling champagne glasses, the band scythed through eight tracks of beautiful, fusion-stained hostility, ably assisted by an A-list cast of musicians that included members of Voivod, Testament, Krallice... and the one and only Kenny G.

22 ROLO TOMASSI

Where Myth Becomes Memory

MNRK



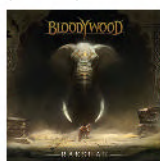
Rolo Tomassi continued to astound with their sixth full-length. A labyrinthine achievement, *Where Myth Becomes Memory*

was able to switch between vulnerability and savagery at the drop of a hat. The final part of a loose trilogy that explored themes of trauma, death, reconciliation and rebirth, this was the most emotionally resonant album of the band's career to date – a towering triumph that cemented Rolo Tomassi's place as one of the most creative contemporary bands in the UK.

21 BLOODYWOOD

Rakshak

SELF-RELEASED



The ascendance of what began as a one-man internet parody project to international writing/recording/ videoing/touring

phenomenon was like something from a futuristic Philip K. Dick short story. Led by guitarist – and former corporate legal eagle – Karan Katiyar, the Bloodywood tale has weaved distant and disparate cultures, genres and social issues together via digital age power, the culmination being *Rakshak*.

Their first all-original-material release masterfully demonstrated that fresh metal/Bhangra/rap/rock iterations are out there in the corners of our shrinking world.

20 MALEVOLENCE

Malicious Intent

NUCLEAR BLAST



For too long Malevolence had been the bullish underdogs, always promising to give UK metal a kick in the proverbials. *Malicious Intent* wasn't just a winning manifesto but resulted in the Sheffield mob doing a victory lap around the stadium, merrily bouncing over the slumped, chastised forms of their doubters. Still heavier and meaner than a granite Bowser, the likes of *Armageddon* and *Higher Place* showed loftier poise and ambition without sacrificing an ounce of the band's intractable zest.

19 GAEREA

Mirage

SEASON OF MIST



With their third campaign, Portugal's shrouded and anonymous metallers unveiled a work of staggering depth and emotion. Fusing their punishing black metal assault with doomy interludes and shattering post-rock crescendos, *Mirage* opened a portal into a realm where sonic brutality and breathtaking beauty coalesced into eight captivating meditations on isolation and suffering. From the bleak undertow of the title track to the stabbing riffs of *Salve*, *Mirage* radiated an exhilarating sense of vitality that found a rousing reception among critics and fans alike.

18 COHEED AND CAMBRIA

Vaxis II: A Window Of The Waking Mind

ROADRUNNER



Coheed And Cambria returned to The Amory Wars story with decent results on 2018's *Vaxis I: The Unheavenly Creatures*, but they got their mixture of wildly bombastic prog and new wave pop hooks just right on its follow-up. *Shoulders* was so massive that it was immediately catapulted toward anthemic status within the band's catalogue, and also made those famous flights of fancy feel even more spectacular when they arrived. Arguably Coheed's best album since those mid-00s glory years.



Like your music batshit?
Step this way...

THE CALLOUS DAOBOYS

The spiritual successors to The Dillinger Escape Plan brilliantly fused math rock with, er, everything else

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

Celebrity Therapist seemed to come from nowhere. The second album from Atlanta, Georgia crew The Callous Daoboys, its mix of mathcore and madness absolutely floored us.

"When we went into the studio, our aim was to create something that we had never heard before," explains vocalist Carson Pace. "We had an idea of how we were going to achieve that. Everything is very meticulously demoed, but we still did think, 'Is this actually going to work?'"

The band's first album, *Die On Mars*, had already marked them out as an exciting prospect in the Dillinger Escape Plan mould. "I feel like we were in this spot where we had this pretty derivative, but very good debut," Carson says. "There was a bit of pressure with that, but my thought process was that the only way we were going to knock it out of the park was to go even more extreme, and even more out of the box. This was always what I heard in my head."

Carson and co need not have worried, because *Celebrity Therapist* works. The manic, scabrous tech metal of their debut album remains, but

**"WE AREN'T
A DILLINGER
ESCAPE PLAN
CLONE"**

CARSON PACE

17 THE CALLOUS DAOBOYS *Celebrity Therapist*

MNRK HEAVY



Underneath such batshit songtitles as *What Is Delicious?*

Who Swarms?

and *The Elephant Man In The Room*, this Atlanta rabble's second album was a scalpel unpicking American cults. Everything from Scientology to the alt-right got lambasted, inspired by frontman Carson Pace's upbringing in the Church Of Christ. The singer roared and ranted over polyrhythmic mathcore, but also crooned baroque pop melodies on entries like *Title Track*. With a host of samples also tossed in, *Celebrity Therapist* was 37 minutes of ferociously unpredictable metal.

it's scattered in among all manner of other genres and stylistic flourishes. Pop, hip hop, breakbeats, Latin rhythms, funk, swing... you name it, *Celebrity Therapist* smooshes it all into one dizzying, maniacal musical trip.

"We aren't a Dillinger Escape Plan clone, we aren't an Every Time I Die clone, this is what our output is going to look like going forward, and if you think [we're derivative], here's a fucking piano ballad!" screams Carson. "I was just asked what our influences are, and people assume it'll be Dillinger or Botch, but it's fucking Björk, Sigur Rós... Kendrick Lamar is a big one! I listen to that shit way more than I listen to heavy music. Heavy music just happens to be our jumping-off point."

The record seemed to connect immediately, with reactions dominating metal Twitter on release day and beyond. "That was so cool," Carson smiles. "I set my alarm to wake up early and see what people were saying. It was just mind-blowing. It felt so good that when it went away, I desperately wanted to find a way to get it back."

As for the future, Carson is keen to play the UK. "I've seen our stats," he nods. "London is the number one place in the world where people listen to us. Literally out of everywhere! So, we're desperate to come over."

And where will The Callous Daoboys take their music next? Best not to try and second guess them.

"Either you stay in this generic space, two-step-breakdown-two-step-breakdown, or you move away from it," shrugs Carson. "As long as we give a fuck, I think we're going to write great songs... and I really, really give a fuck!"

Wormrot: goat just out of shot

WORMROT

After their singer damaged his vocal cords, Singapore's grind stars changed course to dazzling effect

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

Arguably the biggest surprise in our Top 50 this year, Singapore's grindcore gods Wormrot have hit the No.15 spot with the scattershot frenzy of their latest album, *Hiss*. Widely acclaimed and tangibly unique, it expanded the band's musical remit to include everything from shimmering post-rock to corrosive, abstract noise. One thing it didn't seem to have upon initial inspection was any kind of mass appeal. No wonder guitarist and chief songwriter Rasyid Juraimi is so shocked.

"Wow, thank you! I'm as surprised as you are!" he laughs. "We don't know how to react, to be honest. We're not used to all this attention, but it seems like *Hiss* has been getting a lot of positive reactions. I still don't believe it!"

While Wormrot's previous albums undoubtedly had their experimental moments, *Hiss* is a more effusive, genre-blending statement. When (now ex-) vocalist Arif Suhaimi suffered from damaged vocal cords prior to hitting the studio, Rasyid saw new possibilities in the solution.

"In the span of two weeks, he adapted. I think his voice sounds more black metal-ish than before," Rasyid says. "There are certain things he can't do now, so I would say, 'Don't worry about that, do this instead...' and we worked it out."

One thing that's even more startling than Arif's altered vocal approach is the presence of

"THE GOAT STORY WILL FOLLOW US FOREVER!"

RASYID JURAIMI

18-year-old violinist Myra Choo on several of *Hiss*'s most out-there tracks.

"I was talking to my producer and I said I wanted some violins. He suggested we ask Myra, and she agreed, so I sent her the track and then she came up with the melody line that you hear on *Glass Shards*. I gave her a few ideas. You know the movie *The Witch*? I just said, 'Do something like that!' Then I sent her more songs, and she just did it. She's awesome."

Now that *Hiss* has received an unequivocal thumbs up, Wormrot are hoping to return to their usual schedule of relentless touring around the world. Unfortunately, Arif quit the band in May, leaving them as a duo until further notice. Rasyid admits that finding a replacement for his long-time creative partner is going to be tricky, but Wormrot will roll on regardless.

"Technically, we don't need a new vocalist, we just need a touring vocalist," he says. "We have a guy named Gabriel [Dubko] from Vienna, so he'll be with us for a few tours. In the future, I think I'm going to do something more adventurous and creative, and the vocals won't be typical metal vocals. But who knows? I'm going to take this opportunity to branch out and do something new."

Extraordinary albums aside, Wormrot are possibly still best known for a photo taken at an early show at a farm/DIY space in Mauriac, south-central France, attended by the now-legendary Grindcore Goat. Sadly, the goat – real name Biquette – passed away in 2014, but Rasyid acknowledges that nothing ever truly dies on the internet.

"I've already accepted the fact that the story will follow us forever! The goat lived there [at the venue], and so every gig, it was there. We weren't the only band there, you know? Ha ha! It's just that we were the ones that caught the magic!"

16 SLIPKNOT

The End, So Far

ROADRUNNER

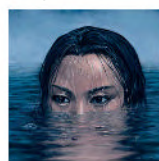


The End, So Far saw the Iowans shaking off all expectations placed upon them. The discordant sounds on opener *Adderall* weren't new, but its ensuing synth-driven six minutes of clean singing revealed an ambitious streak. Tracks like *H377* and *Warranty* showed the band's feral heart, but spiningling choirs, space-rock inflections and ambient instrumentation now sat enticingly alongside their blastbeat-drenched counterparts. Nihilistic and unpredictable, this was Slipknot elevated and re-energised.

15 WORMROT

Hiss

EARACHE



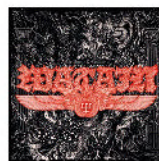
With the news that vocalist Arif Suhaimi was calling it a day, Singapore's finest hammered the lid on the era with their

greatest work to date. *Hiss* was a slap to the ears, seething with all of grindcore's high-water marks: intricacy, velocity and brutality. But there was also attention paid to impeccable structures, hummable hooks and sonic diversity. While the world awaits the remaining members' future moves, hordes are still bellowing the choruses to *When Talking Fails*, *It's Time For Violence* and *Behind Closed Doors*.

14 WATAIN

The Agony & Ecstasy Of Watain

NUCLEAR BLAST



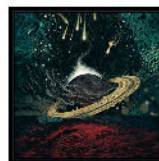
The Swedes reaffirmed their commitment to unleashing the unholy ferocity of black metal with an expansive vision that eclipsed

any notion that the genre must remain fixed or predictable. Recorded live inside an old church, *The Agony...* sounded its allegiance to the old school on tracks like *Funeral Winter* and *The Howling*, but it was the striking melodies, captivating time signatures and rolled-back tempos of *Serimosa* and *We Remain* that highlighted Watain's continued eminence among black metal's fiercest advocates.

13 CAVE IN

Heavy Pendulum

RELAPSE



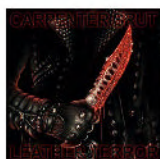
After bassist Caleb Scofield's tragic passing in a truck accident, anyone would be forgiven for assuming that

Cave In were done. Instead, the New England dynamos tapped Converge's Nate Newton to man their low end, then released their most grandiose music to date. *Heavy Pendulum* was a 70-minute behemoth crammed with odes to the band's fallen comrade, from using tunings he invented to lyrically lamenting his passing. Finale *Wavering Angel* wrapped the heartache up in a bow of harmonic riffs and Hetfieldian howls.

12 CARPENTER BRUT

Leather Terror

UNIVERSAL



The second part of a planned trilogy that started with 2018's *Leather Teeth*, this was quite possibly the most metal album of the year that didn't feature guitars. Oh, there were bits that *sounded* like heavily distorted guitar, but that was just Carpenter Brut mastermind and former teenage metalhead Franck Hueso pushing his synths to overdrive. He also roped in guests like Greg Puciato and Ben Koller for this second edition of his fevered darksynth slasher film that never was.

11 MACHINE HEAD

Of Kingdom And Crown

NUCLEAR BLAST



As Machine Head drip-fed fans with material from their 10th record, it swiftly became obvious that they were back to blistering top form. *Of Kingdom And Crown* delivered everything anyone could want from Robb Flynn's crew. There were towering, 10-minute epics such as *Slaughter The Martyr*, instantly memorable anthems like *No Gods, No Masters*, and several of the most brutal songs the band have ever written. Sonically immaculate and laudably cohesive, it was, at the very least, their best since *The Blackening*.

10 CONJURER

Páthos

NUCLEAR BLAST



Four long years separated Conjuror's sensational 2018 debut *Mire* and their major label follow-up this summer, but it was more than worth the wait. While *Mire* was entrenched in sludge-filled riffs and explosive guitar passages to mosh to, *Páthos* saw the Rugby quartet tap into their post-metal side, crafting an expansive and sprawling album that



Clutch: reliable AF

was as beautiful as it was bleak. It didn't ask for multiple listens, it *demand*ed them, and those who took heed were treated to a wonderfully layered and textured release. As for Conjuror themselves, they were touted prior to this as one of the UK's hottest up-and-coming metal bands; with *Páthos*, they have established themselves as arguably the finest in the country.

9 SOUL GLO

Diaspora Problems

EPITAPH



A multi-directional nailbomb detonated from within the heart of the Black experience, Soul Glo's fourth album was a riot of frayed nerves, lurching grooves and feet-to-the-fire vocals that made videogame *The Floor Is Lava* feel like a spa retreat. Throughout its 12 exhilarating, densely visceral tracks, the spirit of Bad Brains was heated up to new boiling points, as the Philadelphia four-piece clattered their way through hardcore, garage punk, and bass-heavy hip hop with all the claustrophobic gravity of a dirtier *This Is America* and sampled spoken word. Pierce Jordan's acute lyrics were the unblinking eye within the sonic storm, and *Diaspora Problems* was a heart-rate-ratcheting, brake-free tour of our unstable times.

8 CLUTCH

Sunrise On Slaughter Beach

WEATHERMAKER MUSIC



On their 13th album, the Maryland stalwarts uncorked nine salvos of pure rock fury that barely exceeded the 33-minute mark.

But not a second was wasted. From the full-throttle blast of *Red Alert* (*Boss Metal Zone*) to the pulse-quickening urgency of *We Strive For Excellence*, *Sunrise...* showed that Clutch used their Covid downtime in the grooviest of ways. Injecting hyper-addictive riffs into sleazy, mid-tempo bangers like *Slaughter Beach*, alongside *Skeletons On Mars*'s immersive forays into space rock and *Jackhammer Our Names*' dusty Western dirge, it lacked nothing in terms of depth or variety. Capturing the band at their sharpest and most inspired, this was a raucous backyard blowout celebrating everything we love about Clutch, while easily claiming its spot among the band's finest works.

7 A.A. WILLIAMS

As The Moon Rests

BELLA UNION

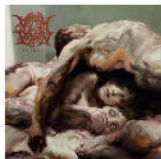


A.A. Williams' 2020 debut, *Forever Blue*, was an instant classic that established the singer-songwriter as a solo star shining with her own dark lustre. It was seemingly a hard act to follow, but Williams managed it effortlessly with her second studio album proper, following a lockdown covers project that had its own quirky charm. Where both *Forever Blue* and *Songs From Isolation* explored a wide range of sounds and genres, *As The Moon Rests* sounded more focused. It also upped the rock element of her repertoire considerably, with carefully placed swells of distortion and fuzz. These never drowned out the emotional content, though, and the beautiful, haunting fragility that made the debut such a special introduction very much remained.

THE 50 BEST ALBUMS OF 2022

6 VENOM PRISON *Erebos*

CENTURY MEDIA



Venom Prison's fourth album was aptly named *Erebos*, after the representation of primordial darkness in mythology. The

album contained all the rampant aggression that had helped establish the Welsh band as one of the most incendiary modern death metal outfits around, but there was also structure amid the chaos. There were deft strokes of light and shade throughout, and *Pain Of Oizys* even saw Larissa Stupar venture into clean-singing territory. Lyrically they explored real-life issues through a lens of Greek mythology. *Golden Apples Of The Hesperides* examined social media manipulation, while *Nemesis* dealt with narcissistic abuse and retribution. Elsewhere they took aim at capital punishment and the treatment of immigrants and added a poetic sheen to their righteous blazing fury.

5 RAMMSTEIN *Zeit*

UNIVERSAL

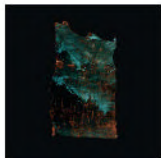


We waited 10 years for Rammstein's seventh album, *Untitled*. Three years later, a global pandemic forced

the Berlin stadium-shaggers to act like a normal band and release the follow-up. Slower and more rooted in the romance between Flake's keys and Till Lindemann's weathered, oaky timbre, a clutch of *Zeit*'s tracks suggested Rammstein were growing old gracefully. But right beside the band's humbling, mournful ruminations on ageing and death were lewd litanies affirming the benefits of big tits, raw-dogging and plastic surgery. Normal service was resumed, then. Autotuned vocals and punk chords wrangled with those unmistakable Rammstein riffs; *Lügen* was genuinely experimental, whereas *Angst* was heavier than a caravan full of regret. *Zeit* rubber-stamped itself (kinky) as the sextet's most consistent record since career-highlight *Mutter*. Groß.

4 CULT OF LUNA *The Long Road North*

RED CREEK / METAL BLADE



Cult Of Luna have been mining a rich seam for some time, with the likes of *Vertikal* and *Mariner's* challenging and

intricately woven layers refusing to dull with the passing of time. But the

Venom Prison:
darkness personified



PRESS/GOBINDER JHITTA

GIGS OF THE YEAR

Live music was back with a bang in 2022!

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL, RICH HOBSON, LIZ SCARLETT, JONATHAN SELZER

MACHINE HEAD

BLOODSTOCK FESTIVAL

This secret gig was the hottest set of the summer, with new material, classics like *Imperium* and rarity *The Dagger*. The streamlined three-piece ensured it was all thrills and no frills.

MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

STADIUM MK

MCR's long-awaited reunion was a landmark event. From the inclusion of live rarities such as *Boy Division* to the anthemic

Welcome To The Black Parade, the fans savoured every moment.

NINE INCH NAILS

THE EDEN PROJECT

Trent's legendary outfit played two very different sets over two evenings, backed by sunshine, rain and biodomes, with visually and sonically spectacular results.

SPIRITBOX

DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL

Two years after going viral with *Holy Roller*, Spiritbox proved the

buzz wasn't purely digital. The tent was packed long before they took the stage, and their set was one of Download legend.

WARDRUNA / HEILUNG

MIDGARDSBLOT FESTIVAL

Pagan folk's standard bearers finally shared a bill, overlooking burial mounds, the Oslofjord and hordes of transfixed Viking re-enactors. Wardruna offered serenity, Heilung a grand guignol spectacle, but both were rapt, timeless experiences.



Ithaca plan to spend 2023 shitting on everyone else

ITHACA

The UK's metallic hardcore hopes turned hurt into healing on an album that pushed them to the next level

WORDS: MATT MILLS

“We are so much more interesting than so many other bands,” declares Ithaca frontwoman Djamila Boden Azzouz. It’s a bold claim, but

one that second album *They Fear Us* backs up. Debut *The Language Of Injury*, released in 2019, had already proved the Londoners could rage just as furiously as The Chariot and Converge, but suddenly they were balancing that anger with shimmering melodies and moody shoegaze. Plus, Djamila’s lyrics were shockingly personal, detailing her experiences in an abusive relationship.

‘I take your calls in the bathroom / So that no one can hear / And wash your blood down the sink / ‘cause we don’t keep souvenirs!’ she violently roared during *In The Way*. The title track’s refrain was: *‘Bow to your blood, your queen and your god.’*

“When I was writing those lyrics, I was coming out of a really dark period of my life,” the singer explains. “I was so beaten down and had just been used up and abused so much. I didn’t know who I was as a person anymore.”

Ithaca had already endured pain. Before recording *The Language Of Injury*, Djamila faced mental health issues, and guitarist Sam Chetan-Welsh’s mother died due to a brain tumour.

“THE BEST REVENGE IS HEALING”

DJAMILA BODEN AZZOUZ

Then, Covid happened. In September 2020, their record label, Holy Roar, ceased operations amid sexual assault allegations against its founder, Alex Fitzpatrick (which he has strongly denied). Going into *They Fear Us*, Djamila was processing her trauma.

“A lot of *They Fear Us* is about revenge in a literal way: the fantasy of revenge against people who have hurt you,” she says. “But there’s also the idea that the best revenge is healing. The main feeling that I got when writing the album wasn’t that I felt better, it’s more that I was trying to heal by writing the album: ‘Maybe if I say it enough times, it’ll happen.’ And that’s what happened.”

Before the album’s release, Ithaca’s 2022 had been frustratingly quiet. A UK tour supporting Møl in February was cancelled. Then, in the summer, the band had to pull out of the 2000trees festival because Djamila – who moved to Berlin with her husband in February – hadn’t had her visa approved in time. “That was a really, really hard time,” she remembers. “I felt like I’d let my bandmates down. I felt like I was ruining it for them.”

So, when Ithaca finally embarked on their first UK headlining tour in August, capping it off with a set at ArcTanGent festival, Djamila says it was “the best feeling in the world”.

“It was so vindicating to see people having a good time,” she says. “I want to see people with smiles on their faces, because that’s what our message is about.”

So what awaits Ithaca in 2023? Touring. “We’ve got some really, really cool, really insane stuff planned for next year,” Djamila enthuses. She breaks into a smile. “We’re just gonna shit on everyone else.”

astonishing depths the Swedish band uncovered on their eighth effort resulted in wealth beyond what any could have foreseen. Distilling the classical elements into their most potent concentration and dousing them liberally over the ethereal riffs of *An Offering To The Wild* and the effervescent glory of *Blood Upon Stone*, Cult Of Luna crafted their most emotionally wrought and devastatingly gorgeous effort to date. Months later the road’s destination still hasn’t presented itself, yet each mile travelled along the unalleviated journey only heightens the senses and spectacle.

3 ITHACA *They Fear Us*

HASSLE



Ithaca were a promising mixture of metallic hardcore and socio-political rhetoric on their 2019 debut album, *The Language*

Of Injury. There was an expectation that they would be able to progress further on their second record, but it’s fair to say not many people anticipated the jump being quite so seismic as the results heard on *They Fear Us*. Everything about Ithaca was heightened; the riffs and grooves were now heavier, catchier and more urgent, and the lyrics delved even further into the band’s collective anger and frustration at the state of the world. But it was vocalist Djamila Boden Azzouz’s performance that really made jaws drop, ranging from beautiful pop melodies to scabrous screams. This was undoubtedly one of the year’s very best.

2 ZEAL & ARDOR *Zeal & Ardor*

MVKA



One of the hottest and most unique bands to breathe new life into metal in the last decade, Manuel Gagneux’s Delta

blues/black metal mash-up finally came of age this year. As wild as the previous pair of efforts were, the self-titled third album found Manuel broadening and fleshing out the sound of his creation even further. There were elements of experimental hip hop, groove metal and a deeper and clearer understanding of the electronic elements they had always employed. What started as a joke bedroom project had now truly blossomed into a shackles-free yet explosively disciplined singular vision. Manuel’s use of wider dynamics and the ever more intense fervour of his delivery made *Zeal & Ardor* his most affecting and infectious album yet.

1 GHOST

Impera

LOMA VISTA



Impera was to *Prequelle* what *Hysteria* was to *Pyromania*. That's not hyperbole; Tobias Forge confirmed as much in this year's *Hammer* cover feature, the Ghost mastermind pulling out the stops to invoke a masterpiece of stadium-sized metal and hard rock brilliance.

Every moment of *Impera* built Ghost's sonic empire to gargantuan proportions. Even the instrumental intro *Imperium* rose on Bon Jovi-esque guitar leads before jetting off into the stars to prove the moon wasn't the only heavenly body comprised of glorious, sky-filling cheese.

From there, it was a whistle-stop tour of unstoppable pop-metal anthems, the breathless rampage of *Kaisarion* giving way to *Spillways* – an ivory-tickling singalong that also served as a reminder that Tobias knew where the money (money, money) is. Lest you thought *Impera* was all about embracing pop sensibility, *Call Me Little Sunshine* and *Hunter's Moon* both brought the heavy metal thunder, picking up the shadow-and-spotlight interplay of past anthems *Cirice* and *Rats* to ensure they achieved their arena-filling potential, and *Twenties* felt like a *Metropolis*-style counterpoint to the gothic horror of *Square Hammer*.

Daft, fun and *fabulous*, *Impera* was everything we needed from music in 2022, smashing down the gates and inviting everybody in earshot to engage in a Bacchanalian celebration and escape the dumpster fire that was the world outside. Every song felt like a Broadway production; from Tobias's histrionic howl that signals the take-off of *Kaisarion* to the grandstanding melodious guitar leads that threw up comparisons to the likes of Richie Sambora and Eddie Van Halen, Ghost lined up just about every trick and cliché from heavy metal's chart-storming heyday and brought them home with a grinning nudge-and-wink that felt like being rugby-tackled by the Cheshire Cat.

When Ghost were 'unmasked' in 2017, it looked like one of modern metal's most engaging – if somewhat poorly kept – mysteries had been dispelled. It was nothing short of miraculous, then, that the band only grew stronger and bigger, making the jump to arena and festival headline status with an assuredness that proved there is much more to them than a bunch of Satanic Swedes in masks. But while its songs were undeniably massive, *Impera* proved that the Ghost mythology remained an integral part of their art – the ascension of Cardinal Copia to full Papa-dom across 14 video chapters building a sense of anticipation and theatricality that outstripped mere progression to veer into mythological territory.

If you can hardly believe that the Ghost of 2022 are the same Satan-loving Swedes that tickled Lee Dorrian's tastemaking-buds in 2010, that's because they *aren't*. This was a different entity entirely, both in concept and in terms of literal musicians, Tobias expanding his horizons as more nations fell under his sway.

The choruses were bigger and the riffs more imperious than ever, but the true magic of *Impera* was how Ghost had transformed campy occult mystique into a bona fide near-religious fervour. A realisation of everything Ghost had been building towards, *Impera* grabbed their ever-swelling congregation by the hoo-has and definitively answered an age-old question: who's your Papa?

GHOST

With a colossal album and some viral luck, Tobias Forge and co continued their tongue-in-cheek winning streak

WORDS: JOE DALY

It was January 2022, and we found ourselves sitting in the empty lobby of a snug Seattle hotel, overlooking the sunset over Puget Sound while soft rock wafted through the PA system.

Across from us was Ghost frontman and mastermind Tobias Forge, and we spent nearly two hours talking about music, family, dogs and the steady ascension of Ghost from spooky Swedish underground band to arena-filling titans. But mostly we were there to talk about *Impera* – their fifth album, then still two months away from release.

In the run-up to an album coming out – particularly one with a highly acclaimed predecessor, like 2018's *Prequelle* – artists tend to convey palpable anxiety as they prepare to relinquish control of their work to the world. Not so with Tobias, who radiated ease and comfort. *Impera* had not yet seen the light of day, but he had already moved on. Looking back at that period today, he explains, "As soon as I am done making a record, I'm pretty much fed up with it. I don't want to hear it, I don't want to know about it, I just want to forget about it. Once it hits the ears of people, depending on how it's being received, that's where you start from scratch again."

Following Ghost's North American tour with Volbeat and Twin Temple, *Impera* was released on March 11. It seamlessly blended pop-savvy songwriting with elaborate arrangements and steady torrents of anthemic pop metal riffage that created a wormhole back to the lighter-raising, arena-rock majesty of the 80s. From the glass-shattering scream that opened *Kaisarion* to the synth-rock squall of *Watcher In The Sky*, it delivered one guitar-powered banger after another.

"THE TIKTOK THING IS A GIANT BONUS"

It was enough to land Ghost their first No.1 position on Billboard's Top Album Sales chart – their fourth Top 10 overall. Even bigger, in terms of vinyl and CD sales, *Impera* scored 2022's biggest first-week sales for any album, of any genre. With more than 62,000 copies sold in the US alone, it easily bested The Weeknd's February CD release of *Dawn FM*. In fact, *Impera* claimed the biggest first sales week for hard rock vinyl since Pearl Jam's *Vitalogy* in 1994.

Critics united in swift and lusty praise. It might have felt heretical at the time, but many early reviews rated *Impera* as besting *Prequelle* on all fronts. Our very own Dave Everley wrote: '*Impera* wins on bolshiness, bravado and skyscraping songs alone. Ghost have turned in a modern metal classic with an arena rock heart. It turns out the Devil doesn't have all the best tunes. Tobias Forge does.' It's safe to say any plans of "starting from scratch" were shoved to the back burner.

Ghost's official Imperatour headlining run took them back across North America and then to Europe. Despite the lingering ravages of Covid across the live music industry, they thrived. "I am very happy that we managed to orchestrate a somewhat functioning but very successful album launch," says Tobias. "We managed to nail 70 shows with just one cancellation. I think in this day and age in this year, that's fucking great!"

Across the globe, stages were filling up with shows that had been booked many years prior. "We had to cut and paste a little with our touring schedule, because this past summer was basically filled with 2020's line-ups," says Tobias. "That made our scheduling a little... I wouldn't say sparse, but we had breaks that were longer than normal. There are so many bands that

are doing these weird dances. The last year of releasing an album into the void, with no touring and cancelling here and there and everywhere, and people having to rethink their lives, basically... ▶

Tobias has a cunning plan up
those voluminous, silky sleeves





More Ghost live dates? Oh hell, yes!

We've been blessed not to have done too much of that."

Logistics aside, somewhere along the line, that cultish little band from Sweden – the one with the creepy frontman singing about Satan and plagues and empires – went mainstream. Propelled by *Impera*'s momentum, the band tapped into new levels of cultural saturation thanks to appearances on mainstays such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*.

"TV always brings you in front of new people," says Tobias. "We did [*The Late Show With Stephen*] *Colbert* a few years ago, and every time you do something like that, you obviously expose yourself to a new scene of viewers. And that's always great, unless you completely shit the bed on the air. Ha ha ha! I think we did do a few things this year that brought in a whole slew of new people into our fanbase."

But ever the realist, he adds, "You might have a spike of people checking you out... but you don't really notice if things like that had any effect. It's not like the day after, all of your shows are now sold out and there's a double night booked into every show you're doing. It's such a slow process that you don't notice until a half year later when new fans come in and say, 'I saw you on *Kimmel*' or 'I saw you with my dad.' I wouldn't say that being on *Kimmel* changed everything. It's been slow, step-by-step, but it builds new branches onto the same tree and you keep growing higher."

And higher they grew. In July, *Mary On A Cross* – originally released on the 2019 EP, *Seven Inches Of Satanic Panic* – was used in a TikTok tribute to the show *Stranger Things*. The ripple effect was staggering. The song landed in the

Top 10 of Spotify's Viral 50 Global chart. As of this issue, the hashtag #MaryOnACross has notched up well over one billion views. Ghost eventually released an official, slowed-down version of the song and the two versions combined now claim more than 180 million Spotify streams and counting. "For us, the TikTok thing was or is just a giant bonus," he explains. "That was never something that we planned."

Surely the unplanned waves of publicity will ferry over legions of new fans, for whom an embarrassment of riches awaits. "One thing that I felt proud over, was the fact that we've been around for 12 years," says Tobias. "We've made five records, a bunch of EPs, and I am glad that there seems to be a song that has a way to suck people in. And if they go into our world and like it, there is plenty to find. If you like *Mary On A Cross*, you can just jump on the train and go where we already are heading."

It's been an uncommonly good year for heavy music, but for Ghost it's been more than a success – it's been a coronation. Despite their demoniacal appearance and transgressive lyrical themes, they have negotiated the near-impossible task of attracting mainstream audiences while holding fast to the diehards in metal who have been there from the start. It creates the enviable problem of facing a new year with new pressures and heightened expectations. But Tobias has a plan.

"We're doing a lot of touring again," he explains. "On previous album cycles

we've done four legs in America and two or three in Europe and repeated. We're going to go into every territory next year, but there's going to be one European tour, one American tour. We are going to do a little bit of everywhere. There'll be a little bit of something up in upper Asia, on the far end there – a very well-established country with a lot of pop cultural fascination, and the home of videogames. And there's going to be something in the Oceania world, and there might be something south of Panama, and there might be something slightly north of Panama. It feels pretty solid."

He cryptically adds, "We're going to come out with a little bit of change before that – good change. We're not going to go silent. Some things are public, other things not in public view, but there are a lot of things brewing."

We are journalistically bound to inquire about the next album and, unsurprisingly, Tobias remains mum. In January, he told us, "Everything I'm doing now is for the next record. I have a vague idea what that will be like and a vague idea of the title and the colour scheme."

For now, that will have to do, but rest assured that as we all continue to enjoy the masterpiece that is *Impera*, Tobias is already hard at work, figuring out dramatic new ways to blow our minds. But he still allows himself the odd moment to stop and take it all in.

"To be able to make all of the shows that we've done, and to have a record that did fairly well, I think the sum of it is pretty fucking awesome," he smiles. "I'm very thankful. It was a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck." **H**

"THERE'S GOING TO BE A CHANGE. A GOOD CHANGE"

GHOST WILL PLAY DOWNLOAD FESTIVAL IN JUNE

KATJA OGRIN

The mainstream finally caught onto the brilliance of Ghost so now we have to share. Humph





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THE REVIEWS

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: SABRINA RAMDOYAL





Ville Valo has returned with a blinder of a solo album

Backxwash has added some more strings to her bow



BACKXWASH

His Happiness Shall Come First Even Though We Are Suffering

UGLY HAG

Trap metal visionary puts the essential into existential

MONTREAL RAPPER AND self-proclaimed cryptid Backxwash has released two titanic albums of industrial hip hop infused with musings on identity and religion. She repurposed white rock history on 2020's sample-heavy debut full-length, *God Has Nothing To Do With This Leave Him Out Of It*, then mastered her own beats on last year's *I Lie Here Buried With My Rings And My Dresses*. On this third instalment of a trilogy, all the songtitles are in her native Nyanja with English translation, but her sampling language has expanded to include more liturgical and classical samples, such as Mozart's *Lacrimosa* on *Vibanda* ('Spirits'). It gives her music a much wider sound than we've heard before, taking her fixation on religion to a whole new dimension.

Two images of Black oppression collide on *Muzungu* ('White Person'): Malcolm X's "Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? The colour of your skin?" and Backxwash's nightmarish vision of lynchings past; *'As the rope of my chin / chokes all my kin / I'm watching my n****s go limp'*. *Nyama* ('Demon') features

unmistakable screams from Pupil Slicer's Kate Davies. It's a joy to see two giants of the queer metal scene working together, and the hook *'Blood is thicker than everything'* hits you in the face

every time it's spat out. Album standout *Juju* ('Witchcraft') features one of Backxwash's most self-assured verses, even while the chorus is brimming with uncertainty. Featuring Ghais Guevara, it also includes a rickety and varied beat, as does *Nfwiti* ('Witch'), where

Backxwash holds down its irregular bars with an easy flow.

His Happiness... ends with *Mukazi* ('Woman'), which sees Backxwash closing her trilogy with an emotional and triumphant finale. She gives a few last words of thanks to family members and friends, supporters and naysayers alike, then closes the chapter. Now her demons are exorcised and her conscience clear, what will come next?

FOR FANS OF: clipping., Black Dresses, Lingua Ignota

ROSIE ESTHER SOLOMON



BLAME KANDINSKY

Eclectic Ruiner

VENERATE INDUSTRIES

Greek mathcore heavies return with a full charge

It's been five years since Blame Kandinsky released their *Spotting Elegance In Chaos* album, but in their defence, an album as dense and complex as *Eclectic Ruiner* must have taken some serious putting together. This is careering, scabrous metallic math rock that finds numerous ways to batter you throughout its 44-minute run time. *Ruined* stops and starts and slows and quickens enough to give you motion sickness, whereas the flurry of riffs on *Gertrude* is a brilliantly stabbing attack. Throughout it all, the Greek quartet hold your interest and serve the song without descending into pure riff salad. Clearly Blame Kandinsky were right to take their time.

FOR FANS OF: Protest The Hero, The Number Twelve Looks Like You, The Chariot

STEPHEN HILL



ELDER

Innate Passage

STICKMAN

Germany's stoner/psych wizards head further out into the aether

Stoner metal is a gateway drug to psychedelic rock, and Elder have indulged in a puff or two of both. Continuing to grind away the rough edges with each release, the Berlin four-piece sink further into the textured, proggy hotbox with their sixth record. While they're still packing

riffs that could give Pallbearer a good scare – *Merged In Dreams – Ne Plus Ultra*, take a bow – it doesn't seem to be Elder's MO anymore. Album finale *The Purpose* showcases the best of their shtick nowadays; layered guitars build with arpeggios Porcupine Tree or Devin Townsend might employ, peppered with shit-kicking solos, bass grooves deeper than Bono's pockets and overblown vintage organ. Lovely.

FOR FANS OF: Pallbearer, Kadavar, Elephant Tree
ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



FEELINGLESS

Metal Against Animal Cruelty

NOBLE DEMON

Soilwork and ex-Amaranthe singers seek to free the four-legged

Inspired by Avantasia's star-studded *The Metal Opera*, Spanish guitarist Hugo Markaida wants to be the melodeath Tobias Sammet with this 20-vocalist extravaganza. Singers such as Soilwork's Björn Strid and Cage Fight's Rachel Aspe have united, with profits from this debut going to animal shelters. Ultimately, the number of risks these songs take with their genre is equal to how many fucks people should give about Alestorm, but the amount of talent should yank loyalists through. Björn is reliably dynamic on *Feelingless* and *Guilt*, while *Nostalgia* casts Rachel's roars against ex-Amaranthe singer Jake E.'s croons. Hugo's chops, epitomised on *Peace's* barrage of harmonies and thrash, are equally great. Sick riffs and star turns for a good cause? Go on then!

FOR FANS OF: Soilwork, Shadows Fall, Insomnium

MATT MILLS



HAMMERS OF MISFORTUNE

Overtaker

SELF-RELEASED

San Francisco's esoteric metal icons go for the jugular

Over six extraordinary records, Hammers Of Misfortune have been tireless in their march toward progressive metal's crazed outer limits. *Overtaker* continues that tradition, but in keeping with these dark, fractious times, it's by far the most vicious thing they've done. *Dark Brennius* and epic closer *Aggressive Perfection* offer an untamed hybrid of frenzied, black-ish thrash and perverse, angular prog that hurtles along at such a manic pace you may fear for founder John Cobbett's state of mind. Often sounding like everything at once and nothing at all, these songs are every bit as strange and adventurous as those on early classic *The August Engine*, but they're audibly guided by a far more urgent need to shatter skulls. With album highlight *Don't Follow The Lights'* Slayer-meets-Cardiacs chaos, this is sheer white-knuckle bedlam.

FOR FANS OF: Voivod, Sigh, Arcturus

DOM LAWSON



HE IS LEGEND

Endless Hallway

SPINEFARM

US alt rockers anchor themselves in the unexpected

Someone really hit the nail on the head when they called He Is Legend one of

"metal's best-kept secrets". Over seven albums, the North Carolina alt rockers have flown under the radar, churning out a sleazy blend of Southern rock, hardcore and metal that's sporadic up top and sludgy below. Unpredictability continues to define them. While thick grooves keep everything anchored to Earth, *Endless Hallway* experiments with eerie drones on *Honey From The Hive*, melodic punk on *Sour* and the Gojira-influenced doom of *Lifeless Lemonade* but, as always, their party trick is 'the journey'. *The Prowler* starts with a barrage of drums and twitchy guitars, and ends up somewhere completely unexpected, collapsing into a breathless verse and a chorus mired in scuzz. He Is Legend continue to keep us on our toes.

FOR FANS OF: Thrive, Every Time I Die, Soundgarden

DANNI LEIVERS



HIGH COMMAND

Eclipse Of The Dual Moons

SOUTHERN LORD

Massachusetts' thrash barbarians hoist up their broadsword

In the thrall of Conan scribe Robert E. Howard's ripping yarns as much as the rapier riffs of thrash's first wave, this Massachusetts quintet return to their fictional world of Secartha for album two. Featuring eight more tales of swords and sorcery, *Eclipse Of The Dual Moons* sees High Command charge forward with a darker, denser sound. There's no shortage of ambition and the grandiose final track, *Spires Of Secartha*, draws on Ennio Morricone, while the gloriously groovy *Imposing Hammers Of Cold Sorcery* shows off the band's impressive technical chops.

Frontman Kevin Fitzgerald has a blast bringing his characters to life (and then killing them), and the likes of the synth-spiced, Dio-esque *Fortified By Bloodshed* helps ensure *Eclipse Of The Dual Moons* remains as deadly as a barbed wire-wrapped mace.

FOR FANS OF: Exodus, Frozen Soul, Overkill

EDWIN McFEE



JONATHAN HULTÉN

The Forest Sessions

KSCOPE

Former Tribulation guitarist hosts a sumptuous visual séance

Jonathan Hultén's 2020 full-length solo debut was an immersive collection of acoustic balladry that forged deep connections to the natural world. He's reimagined several songs from both that album and his 2017 EP, presenting them as a collection of videos. All footage – eight songs – was filmed within a single 24-hour period throughout the Swedish countryside, and the tracks include accompanying poems and animations. The results are captivating. While the new versions aren't dramatically different from the originals, the vignettes capture Jonathan alone in the woods performing in both golden rays of sunshine and ink-black night. Accompanied by little more than a single instrument and the sounds of the forest, these performances bristle with warmth and intimacy. *The Forest Sessions* adds vibrant colours to familiar songs and the videos cast a cosy glow that hits just right on a cool winter evening.

FOR FANS OF: Nick Drake, Wovenhand, Hexvessel

JOE DALY



Trevor Strnad: we miss him

THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER

Yule 'Em All: A Holiday Variety Extravaganza

METAL BLADE

Seasonal swansong for one of metal's favourite sons

THE DVD RELEASE of this lockdown livestream comes at a poignant and pivotal time for The Black Dahlia Murder. Having just returned to the stage with guitarist Brian Eschbach now filling the vacant mic stand, the uncertain future of one of the century's most consistent and cherished metal bands now finally seems optimistic.

As a final release before this new era swings into action, *Yule 'Em All* serves as a swansong for the irrepressible charm of the late Trevor Strnad and is a worthy celebration of the nine albums he helmed. As was the case with any livestream, the show lacks the sweaty, chaotic nature of a typical TBDM show, and isn't the most thrilling of the band's live documents. That said, the festivities do allow the band to display their daft humour in between superb musical displays by guitar wizard Brandon Ellis and the under-appreciated rhythm duo of Max Lavelle and Alan Cassidy.

With the 17 songs played chronologically, the release also serves as a chance to observe the steady evolution of the band's melodeath worship, from the rambunctious riffery of *Funeral Thirst* and *Contagion* through to the stately *In Hell Is Where She Waits For Me* and the fiendish thrill of *Kings Of The Nightworld*. It also provides the only opportunity most will have to see Trevor performing tracks from 2020's *Verminous*, with the malicious title track and supreme twin leads of *Sunless Empire* among the band's finest moments to date.

Admittedly, the comedic interludes – including Corpsegrinder from perennial touring buddies Cannibal Corpse advertising ham sanitiser – may require you to be in on the joke. But above all, this is a timely reminder of how lucky we are to be able to experience live music back in person again, and a final snapshot of the much-loved Trevor doing what he did best.

FOR FANS OF: Carcass, At The Gates, Arsis

ADAM BRENNAN





Kaoteon fight back against the ruling classes

KAOTEON *Neither God Nor Master*

BLOOD BLAST

Lebanon-sired black/death renegades hone their blistering craft

IT'S A MIRACLE that Kaoteon exist. The Lebanese black/death metal project's leader, Anthony Kaoteon, was born in 1983 in Beirut, and spent every other day of his childhood in a bomb shelter during a 15-year-long civil war. He started his band in his mid-teens, then endured ungrounded arrests and the inability to tour internationally for more than a decade, before relocating to the Netherlands in 2012.

Neither God Nor Master is the third album since Kaoteon emigrated halfway around the world. The stars that leant the band's last, self-titled full-length its pedigree – namely, ex-Obscura bassist Linus Klausenitzer and At The Gates sticksman Adrian Erlandsson – return. However, co-founding singer Walid Wolfust has vanished, replaced by Dutch unknown Terry Stocker.

Initially, it's the singer who widens the eyes the most. At the start of *A Dying Soul*, he seethes and sobs over ominous arpeggios, his howl of 'Why?!' heralding the album's first distorted guitar lick. It's an apt start for 10 songs laden with high-pitched hisses, each one so packed with anguish it paints the picture of a man not sustainably growling into a microphone, but uncontrollably wailing over the whole world's suffering.

Musically, *Neither God...* stays in the mould built by Kaoteon's last two outings: traditional black metal brutality scrapping with dissonant and death metal flairs. The virtuosity and sliding riffs are comparable to Ihsahn, such as when *Nimrod's Demise* explodes from a thumping bass lick to cascading chords. The title track is just as quick to nab attention, except it pairs tumbling drums with melodeath guitar taps.

Bar the new pipes on display, *Neither God...* is no great renovation for Kaoteon. However, this is clearly still a formula with legs. Be thankful that this outfit escaped their oppressive backdrop and are finding their groove – and long may they continue.

FOR FANS OF: Ihsahn, Gojira, Belphegor
MATT MILLS



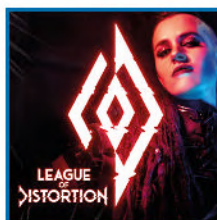
IN THE WOODS...

Diversum
SOULSELLER

Kristiansand's cult prog metallers find a new lease of life

Trailblazers in the late-90s 'weirding of Norway', In The Woods... attained cult status with 1997 avant-prog-doom masterpiece *Omnio*, but since returning after a 14-year hiatus have struggled to match its singular class. *Diversum* instead enhances what they've been driving at since 2016 comeback *Pure*, and the heightened focus on elegant, well-paced songwriting results in a platter of wall-to-wall bangers. *Diversum* – Latin for 'Different' – evokes a characteristic that no longer fully applies to ITW 2022. It's not a wildly innovative smorgasbord of sounds and vibes, it's a beguiling collection of infectious, emotional dark prog metal tunes, and that'll certainly do.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Katatonia, Borknagar
CHRIS CHANTLER



LEAGUE OF DISTORTION

League Of Distortion
NAPALM

Symphonic metal veterans unite and head into combat

Former members of Exit Eden and Kissin' Dynamite have united for this self-titled debut. Wolf howls and distorted blasts abound on theatrical tubthumper *Wolf Or Lamb*, before *My Revenge* sees vocalist Anna Brunner waxing vitriolic among electronic beats and

skittish riffs. There are moments when the heavy-yet-emotive formula becomes predictable, but *I'm A Bitch*, *Rebel By Choice* and *Do You Really Think I Fuckin' Care?* are all legitimate bangers, packed with cranium-invading choruses, caustic screams and surging hard rock riffs. *Solitary Confinement* comes loaded with irrepressible chants, and sees an unapologetic Anna at full pelt. LOD may not be breaking new ground, but musically, they're confident and accessible.

FOR FANS OF: Venues, Icon For Hire, Annisokay
SOPHIE MAUGHAN



LIONHEART *Welcome To The West Coast III*

ARISING EMPIRE

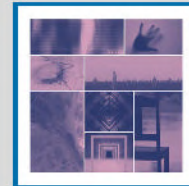
North Californian hardcore crew host an all-star beatdown

Since 2007, Lionheart have released a steady stream of albums with energising fretwork, fan-rallying gang shouts, frustrated lyrics, and distinctive vocals and swagger courtesy of Rob Watson. They deliver a fierce, groove-ridden breed of hardcore that the world needs right now and, judging by the guests here, the scene agrees. Ice-T (Bodycount), Antimony (E-Town Concrete), Los (Desmadre), Alex Taylor (Malevolence), and Jamey Jasta (Hatebreed) all appear with an air of effortless familiarity authentic to the Lionheart sound. Tracks like *New Money / Old Pain* and *Hell On Earth* prove that Lionheart can hold their own, but the collaborations make for an extra-special album.

FOR FANS OF: Terror, Hatebreed, Madball
NIK YOUNG

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'



CIRCLES

The Stories We Are Afraid Of | Vol 1

WILD THING

The Aussie alt metallers' six-tracker is loaded with angular riffs, skull-rattling breakdowns and subtle shimmers of electronica. The stirring *Echo* is flooded with hypnotic despair.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN



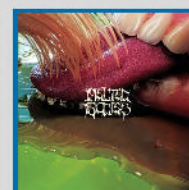
GLITCHERS

Ctrl Alt Del

SELF-RELEASED

Those lamenting the demise of Every Time I Die could do a lot worse than this DIY duo with a penchant for street shows. Big riffs and an acerbic attitude gleefully propel this six-track EP.

ADAM BRENNAN



MELTED BODIES

The Inevitable Fork Vol.1

SELF-RELEASED

Melted funk, tech-metal and haunted synths collide in this LA's band's first of three EPs that will make up a full album. It's like Fudge Tunnel, Ween and Sikh all fighting for your attention at once. Amazing stuff.

STEPHEN HILL



LOWER AUTOMATION

Strobe Light Shadow Play

ZEGEMA BEACH

Windy City noisniks keep flying the punk/post-hardcore flag

Chicago's Lower Automation make a hell of a racket. Clearly influenced by the noisy post-hardcore movement of the late 90s and early 2000s, they conjure memories of when The Blood Brothers, At The Drive In and Fugazi were all twisting punk rock into wildly inventive new shapes. It's great to hear a band taking that style and trying to recreate it in 2022, but the bar for this style is fantastically high, and Lower Automation are still in the processes of reaching for it. They are getting there, though, and *Strobe Light Shadow Play* is undoubtedly their strongest effort so far. The thick slabs of riffs that drive *The 99* and *Acolytic* are a welcome addition to their wild, glitching, slaloming hardcore. Decent.

FOR FANS OF: At The Drive In, The Fall Of Troy, Blood Brothers

STEPHEN HILL



OCEANS

Hell Is Where The Heart Is

NUCLEAR BLAST

Post-metal/metalcore quartet triple down on the heartache

Oceans have released the tracks that comprise *Hell Is Where The Heart Is* slowly over the course of the past year and three EPs. While there's clearly a thematic reason for doing so – each segment begins with a spoken-word introduction

on “withered hearts”, love and loss – there isn't much to differentiate them musically. On the groove-laden *The Awakening* and *Living=Dying*, the German post-metal crew come over like a more atmospheric Korn, with Timo Rotten's raspy belt adding further drama to juddering hooks and sinister keys. But the truly interesting moments come when they break that mould. The standout track here is the slow-burning *If There Is A God She Has Abandoned Us*, which builds over skeletal piano to a genuinely searing climax and confirms there is more to this band than meets the eye.

FOR FANS OF: Korn, Annisokay, Landmvrks
DANNII LEIVERS



SPIRITWORLD

Deathwestern

CENTURY MEDIA

Thrash-fuelled dispatches from the post-apocalyptic frontier

Spiritworld's debut, *Pagan Rhythms*, galloped into the spotlight with a load of Slayer-inspired riffs strapped to its saddle and introduced the metal world to singer Stu Folsom's 'death western' universe – an apocalyptic American frontier as raw and unrelenting as its scorched desert backdrop. Now, we return to this world and its post-apocalyptic survivors, in a follow-up that sees these Sin City brawlers grow in stature. Jackhammering, combative thrash and hardcore riffs kick off their tirade on *Mojave Bloodlust*, segueing into the screeching inferno of the title track. Bringing the pace, *Purified In Violence* ramps up the heaviness with metronome-like precision, while *Moonlit*

Torture is a drum-first slice of brutality adding to a deeply immersive, riff-heavy experience until the bitter end. Dense, groovy and hardwired for headbanging, *Deathwestern* is a bigger, bolder chapter in Spiritworld's Horror-Western saga.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Black Breath, Testament

HOLLY WRIGHT



WOODS OF DESOLATION

The Falling Tide

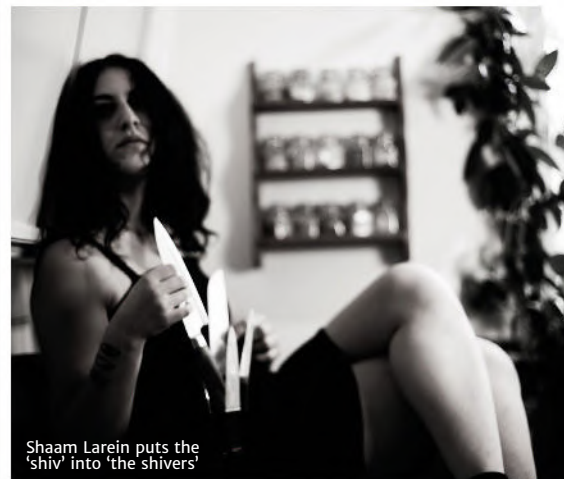
SEASON OF MIST

Solo atmospheric BM adventures from the Wollongong wilds

Atmospheric black metal is tricky business. The genre aches from the endless parade of bands churning out waves of generic soundscapes that are virtually indistinguishable from each other. Adding touches of shoegaze and post-rock, Woods Of Desolation's D. has steered clear of these creative perils, crafting songs with strong melodies and, dare it be said, a sense of optimism? *Beneath A Sea Of Stars* and *Far From Here* both draw heavily upon black metal's enduring textural palette of blastbeats and tremolo-picked riffage, while the gauzy tracks *The Passing...* and *Anew* could almost be separate parts of the same track. The second half of the album contains the most compelling ideas, striking a blissful balance between dreampop, shoegaze and atmospheric black metal. Though far from revolutionary, *The Falling Tide* is an eminently enjoyable collection that's very much worth a spin.

FOR FANS OF: Violet Cold, Unrequited, Alcest

JOE DALY



Shaam Larein puts the 'shiv' into 'the shivers'

SHAAM LAREIN

Sticka En Kniv I Världen

SVART

Deep, gothic dives into Sweden's psychic recesses

TAKING THE NAME of their enigmatic singer – a woman raised on Russian avant-garde art and cinema – Shaam Larein's auteur-like vision is enhanced with artwork and videos from brothers Pelle and Gottfrid Åhman, formerly of In Solitude. All residents of Uppsala, Sweden, the bands have much in common, Shaam Larein differing in their more deconstructed take on post-punk and goth rock. The doomier overtures of 2020 debut *Sculpture* remain. The aggression has been lessened, but equally potent passions intertwine on songs glowering with seductive menace.

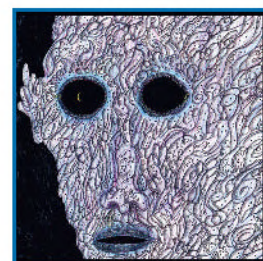
Sparse, shaken compositions that build to grandiose flourishes are soon snuffed out by all-consuming, minimalist darkness. Translating as 'Stick A Knife In The World', the title track is an arresting opener, Shaam's hushed vocal commanding over a smouldering riff that fizzles, only to reignite in blazing choruses. *Flesh Of Gold*'s serpentine bassline weaves between mystic leads and bewitching vocal harmonies from singer Nathalie Ahlbom and keyboard player Linnea Hjertén that reach full force on *Beware The Duchess*.

There are moments of tortured disharmony, too. The theatrical *Murderer* draws you into an unsettlingly louche tale, as characterful solos amid swathes of carnivalesque organ add melodrama to the horrific side show. *Leave Me Here To Die* conjures a ceremonial space, its sparse percussion and hushed harmonies bringing to mind flickering candles fighting for survival in sacrosanct caverns. Closer *Massacre* bursts to life with spiteful guitars and a driven vocal, questioning, a paean to the death of dreams.

Sticka En Kniv I Världen isn't a gateway album into the depths of goth rock, it's a dramatic deep-dive exploration of and experimentation with its tropes. The devil is in the details on a slow-burner that digs its nails progressively further into your flesh, given time.

FOR FANS OF: Hexvessel, Dool, The Devil's Blood

TOM O'BOYLE



LIVE REVIEWS

DAMNATION
FESTIVAL 2022

BOWLERS EXHIBITION CENTRE, MANCHESTER

Converge and At The Gates revisit the classics at the UK's newly expanded extreme metal fest

UPGRADED TO A sold-out 6,000-capacity venue with three rooms ranging from vast to still pretty fucking big, Damnation is a prime example of how successful festivals can be when they allow themselves to grow organically. It's also testament to the spirit of both the event and the punters that the vibe of camaraderie and dedication is still potent throughout the Bowlers Exhibition Centre.

The satisfyingly sonorous rumble of bewitching Cleveland doomsters **FRAYLE** on the second, Holy Goat stage provides a smouldering opening crucible, sparking festivities to life before **IRIST**'s combination of post-metal and agitated sludge proves to be a compelling introduction to the main Pins & Knuckles stage. The audience continues to swell throughout, and the Atlantans are clearly excited to be on their first European tour.

OCEANO's reputation clearly precedes them, their constant flipping of the killswitch between deep, guttural-fuelled heat blasts and crushing breakdowns drawing a raging crowd to the Holy Goat stage. Meanwhile, Toulouse's multi-instrumentalists **BRUT** live up to their moniker – translated as 'noise' – as their neo-classical string arrangements build uneasily to a post-rock crescendo and collapse, leaving their large audience agog.

The Germans aren't characteristically known for their sense of humour and **INSANITY ALERT** aren't going to do anything to change that on the main stage. Strip away the wacky, painfully unfunny interludes and between-songs bantz and you're left with a perfectly average thrash band. Back on the second stage, **BELL WITCH** and **AERIAL RUIN**'s guitarist/vocalist Erik Moggridge combine to perform their 2020 collaboration record, *Stygian Bough Volume I*. It's a funereal, attention span-testing set. **SO HIDEOUS**'s sweeping, blackened



Frayle herald the dawn of Damnation

hardcore catches turbulent, emotional headwinds that blow them in the direction of this year's headliners before the main stage plays host to **FULL OF HELL**'s seething grind. It's a very clipped take on the subgenre, though, and eschewing groove for an unrelenting, scabrous assault means they lack the dynamics to fill the hall.

Don't let the *Evil Dead* intro tape and flashes of 'lightning' fool you; **INCANTATION** have no time for theatricality. More akin to being swallowed by a slag-heap landslide, their murkily atmospheric death-doom is approached with dogged ferocity, opening a portal to the fetid realms of the old school. **WE LOST THE SEA**'s second-ever performance in the UK is absolutely magnificent, showcasing plenty of material from their latest album *Triumph & Disaster*. The Aussies' stirring, epic post-rock is an emotional tour de force, and a welcome respite from the bludgeoning sets elsewhere.

"Watching **PIG DESTROYER** play a sold-out arena" accurately sums up Damnation's greatest strength. In turning grindcore classic *Prowler In The Yard* into an arena-worthy masterpiece, they don't just feel like grind legends, but a world-conquering force no stage is fit to contain. Is that rattling drums or bones emanating from a mist-

enshrouded second stage? Both, summoning a suitably atavistic atmosphere for **WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM**. Their meeting of primal black metal ferocity and spiritualism has thrilling moments, but the balance is off, making for a 50-minute set that's more a ramble than a rage through the wilderness.

After packing out Roadburn and Desertfest, **GREEN LUNG**'s capacity crowd at Damnation is par for the course. Where others struggle to adapt to bigger stages, Green Lung thrive, armed not only with enormous Sabbath-invoking riffs, but the showmanship to make songs like *Reaper's Scythe* feel truly colossal. Considering this is only the third show **MY DYING BRIDE** have played since 2017, you'd expect the crowd for the main hall to be far larger, but with nothing from the last album, *The Ghost Of Orion*, this is an old-school set for the diehards. *The Cry Of Mankind*'s lush opening cadence gets the biggest cheers, although the overall scabrous tone reaches its pinnacle with a scorched *Turn Loose The Swans*.

MISERY INDEX stoke insurrectionary flames with their slamming death metal. The nasty, grinding edge on the likes of *Manufacturing Greed* whips the pit into such a frenzy they need to stop briefly to ensure everyone's safety. Diversity in programming is essential, though, and Damnation provide aptly with the beautiful mellifluous refrains of **40 WATT SUN**. Patrick Walker's sublime, autumnal folk songs take on epic proportions while still managing to retain intimacy. Pure nourishment for the soul. Between Justin Broadrick's wrathful-deity vocals and the inhuman industrial beats of *Streetcleaner*, **GODFLESH**'s set feels like a disco in Hell. With Ministry and early Swans reinterpreted through Napalm Death as a seismic, ear-sanding blast of danceable heft, they ensure they're a festival highlight two years running.

THE SET

CONVERGE
Concubine
Fault And Fracture
Distance And
Meaning
Hell To Pay
Homewrecker
The Broken Vow
Bitter And
Then Some
Heaven In
Her Arms
Phoenix In Flight
Phoenix In Flames
Thaw
Jane Doe

ENCORE

Wolverine Blues
I Can Tell You
About Pain
Dark Horse

At The Gates return to melodeath ground zero



Green Lung: another maximum-capacity performance

Converge lurch back into their trail of devastation



Pig Destroyer unleash the full grandeur of grindcore

Deathcore, but not as you now know it, **DESPISED ICON**'s fusion of actual old-school death metal blasts and actual street-level hardcore values draws deeply on the lasting power of both scenes. The result is a rollicking, groove-battered combustion engine as pits swirl throughout the second stage. Next door, **PALLBEARER** are at their heartbreaking best, peaking with a spine-tingling rendition of *The Ghost I Used To Be*. Their riffs convey the burdensome weight of tragedy, equally as emotive as their more pensive, meandering moments.

AT THE GATES effectively wrote the book on arena-worthy extremity with *Slaughter Of The Soul*, so naturally

seeing it played to an electrified crowd is nothing short of magic. Returning guitarist Anders Björler ensures freight-train riffs and dexterous guitar leads never sounded so vital, encore *The Night Eternal* bringing in a sense of pendulous menace from the revitalised melodeath legends. Even on a line-up as prestigious as Damnation's, **DECAPITATED** feel like a cut above the rest, their set mixing brutal beatdowns, angular technical nastiness and even passages of melody to show just how multifaceted their approach to brutality is. Meanwhile, **ELDER** aren't just a revelation, but a source of ever-replenishing wonder. Each mammoth riff feels like it's

passed through a prism and splayed out into a dazzling spectrum of prog-psych splendour.

Finally, **CONVERGE** bring the fireworks indoors with a full rendition of the incendiary *Jane Doe*. It proves more than mere nostalgia trip. From the spasmodic launch of *Concubine* onwards, every bandmember is on top of their game. Returning for an encore kicked off by a defiant rendition of Entombed's *Wolverine Blues*, they reaffirm their status as monumentally influential scene-shattering leviathans and worthy Damnation headliners.

**REMFY DEDMAN/RICH HOBSON/
TOM O'BOYLE/JONATHAN SELZER**

Cometh the hour, cometh
the Filthosaurus

CRADLE OF FILTH

ALCEST / RED METHOD

INDIGO AT THE O2, LONDON

Suffolk's macabre metal institution celebrate the spooky season

DOES ANY BAND better embody Halloween than Cradle Of Filth? Spooky, silly and adorned in ridiculous outfits, the Suffolk sextet are at the peak of their powers on the most evil night of the year. For this All Hallows Eve, it's Indigo At The O2 hosting Dani Filth's ghastly gathering, and London's **RED METHOD** are commencing the festivities. Slipknot comparisons are inevitable, thanks to their masked guitar player, near-uniform costumes and canon of nu/death metal ragers. However, none can dispute their impact as their snarling and chugging ignites the first pits of the evening.

ALCEST's ambient, shoegaze-inspired take on black metal is less in-your-face than the rest of the bill. That said, it's absolutely beautiful. The first three songs from 2019's *Spiritual Instinct* open. *Les Jardins de Minuit*, *Protection* and *Sapphire* cast the gamut of black metal guitar playing – tremolo picking, chords and jagged squeals – against meditative rhythms, as well as leader Neige's high-pitched croons. Even more solemn are *Autre Temps* and *Délivrance*, both complementing the delicate vocals with their silken shoegaze tones. Factor in that light-show, where the spotlights ascend

with every shimmering riff, and these 45 minutes feel like a holiday to Heaven: respite from the demonic lunacy both before and to come.

It's only been a year since the capital last embraced **CRADLE OF FILTH**, but that was enough time for the band's revolving door of musicians to keep on spinning. Guitarist Donny Burbage has replaced Richard Shaw, while Dani's reached into his endless bag of keyboard-playing opera singers to find Zoe Marie Federoff. She's apparently popular, as, during opener *Existential Terror*, her pipes are higher in the mix than the frontman's. All the while, harmonic riffs fly in all directions, strings swell on the backing tape and Dani shreds his own throat with a squawking Rob Halford impression.

The pomp's not just sonic, either. Two nine-foot-tall skeletons flank the stage and the mic stand is a twisting *Evil Dead* tree trunk. Later, during *I Am The Thorn*, Dani wields a fucking gun, aiding the barrage of cannons that fire confetti all over the venue. Then there's the fire, sparks and CO₂ towers. It all amasses to a visual treat from the scary season's best-dressed provocateurs.

MATT MILLS

Alcest: still in the
ascendant after
two decades

BURY TOMORROW AUGUST BURNS RED

O2 INSTITUTE, BIRMINGHAM

Almost two decades in, Pennsylvania's **AUGUST BURNS RED** remain among the highest-quality purveyors of melodic metalcore. Roaring out of the blocks with the hyperactive shred of *Vengeance* and *Bloodletter*, so honed is the explosion of airtight technicality and infectious grooves that every moment of their set maintains a pulse-pounding high. The reaction to **BURY TOMORROW**, however, is akin to a returning heroes' welcome, the fervour matched by the kind of brutal potency indicative only of acts at the top of their game. "It feels fucking powerful in here tonight!" proclaims Dani Winter-Bates, as visceral opener *Choke*, *The Grey (VIXI)* and *Black Flame* up the heavy ante in all the right places, the frontman stirring souls as well as pits on his insistence that we move in closer and "get the fuck up!" during earworm *The Age*. A glittering sea of smartphones illuminates the sold-out venue during *Better Below*, but there's equal enthusiasm for new track *Boltcutter*. Its clattering riffs and barbed screams send everyone into headbanging ecstasy. Neatly balancing teeth-clenching brutality with stunning melodies, BT are on show-stopping form, and remain a formidable force in modern metalcore.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

CELLAR DARLING BLACK ORCHID EMPIRE

THE KEY CLUB, LEEDS

BLACK ORCHID EMPIRE's gale-force rock is worthy of a grander stage, and they know it. "Can we get some more lights?" smiles affable vocalist Paul Visser, before he's bathed in a red glow for a muscular *Evergreen*. The Londoners, who deal in fuzzy, down-to-earth riffery and uplifting vocal harmonies, are an odd fit against the otherworldly transcendence of tonight's headliners, but they go down a storm and have a genuine crowd singalong in the anthemic *Winter Keeps Us Warm*. **CELLAR DARLING's** set highlights come from the ex-Eluveitie trio's 2019 album, *The Spell*, which took their prog-tinged folk metal in a heavier, gothic direction and weaves an unsettling atmosphere. As Anna Murphy jumps effortlessly between instruments, her vocals are as sharp and pure as crystal, while the eerie churn of the hurdy gurdy wraps, mist-like, around cobwebby guitars on *Pain* and *Death*. It's a shame, then, that the band abandon that album's superior material halfway through the set. Sure, songs from 2017 debut, *This Is The Sound* cast an enchantment of their own, but they can't hold a candle to a beast like *Insomnia*, which comes across like a Grimm's fairytale, spiralling ominously into a nightmare.

DANNII LEIVERS

ARCHITECTS

CHALK, BRIGHTON

Brighton's metalcore masters host a homecoming for the faithful

TONIGHT IS A hometown launch show for Architects' 10th studio album, *The Classic Symptoms Of A Broken Spirit* – a record that has already proven to be pretty divisive. The online discourse has been about whether the Brighton metalcore mob's new direction of far more straightforward, instantaneous and hook-filled tunes is the right one for them. On the evidence of their performance here, anyone who doubts these new songs really should get out and see them in the live setting immediately, because as soon as they step onto the tight confines of Chalk's stage and blast into *Deep Fake*, any fears the new material will flop live evaporate in seconds.

Architects have always been a fantastic live band, full of energy and blessed with Sam Carter's charisma and world-class pipes. But, whereas many of their older songs gave off a threatening and claustrophobic air live, there's now often a joyous one as well. Clearly energised by the new songs, they grin from ear to ear as they stomp through a propulsive *Tear Gas* while the magnificently massive *All the Love In The World* has more hooks than a *Hellraiser* movie.

That's not to say the band have lost any of their edge. A furious *Modern Misery*, and the emotionally gut-punching one-two of *Gone With The Wind* and *Doomsday*, with Sam clearly moved to tears as they exit the stage at the end of the main set, prove that Architects have plenty of bite left in them. But, overall, this is as celebratory and relaxed as we've seen them for some time. They encore with *When We Were Young*, where Sam ends up being jumped on before carrying a fan about the stage, and a mass singalong to *Animals*, which sees the vocalist head off into the venue, egging the crowd on from the bar. The reception they receive as they leave shows just how much this band still mean to their fans. "We just want to have fun," Sam says, as he addresses the sweaty throng at one point, almost apologetically. He has no need to downplay it; after all the things Architects have been through, no one could begrudge them their right to enjoy the fact that they're still here. And with a set as tremendous as this, we're just as pleased to still have them.

STEPHEN HILL



Architects successfully run the gauntlet with their new material



Conjurer's Brady Deeprose perfects the metal quiff

NILE KRISIUN

THE GARAGE, LONDON

"We are KRISIUN! And we're going to fuck this motherfucker up!" bassist/vocalist Alex Camargo howls as the Brazilian battalion march into The Garage. It's an introduction as subtle as a sledgehammer, and the thrash-flecked death metallers attack with all of their most reliable weapons as blastbeats and whirling riffs ignite the pit. The sole misfire is that the headliners' drums are so gargantuan that they push their support's to the front of the stage, the lack of space rooting the trio to the spot for an hour. Fortunately, NILE's technical death metal battering justifies their hardware. Drummer George Kollias blasts faster than a Gatling gun, while guitarists Karl Sanders and Scott Eames complement the speed with lashings of sweep arpeggios. London's not here for some jazz-metal wankathon, though; it wants riffs to bludgeon its heads in, and the caveman breakdowns of *Kafir!* and *Sarcophagus* clearly deliver, begetting roars of delight. Scott's growls only accentuate the aggro, and combine with his effortless playing and onstage authority to make it seem like the newcomer's been here since day one. A career-spanning setlist caps off this marathon of muscularity in the capital.

MATT MILLS

THE PRETTY RECKLESS

02 BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Having been forced to cancel their preceding show in Norwich due to front-woman Taylor Momsen's cold, you could be forgiven for not expecting tonight's sold-out performance to run faultlessly. But from the get-go the band stampede like a hard rock blizzard, swamping everyone with booming percussion and snappily tight riffs. Taylor's bellicose, rip-roaring vocals, meanwhile, take on an additional, lurgy-induced huskiness. She's transfixing, frolicking playfully across the stage, grinding up against the bass drum and bending her back as if trying to mimic scenes from *The Exorcist*. The setlist is spot-on too; from *Make Me Wanna Die* through the fan-requested *Just Tonight to My Medicine* and *Heaven Knows*, every moment is marked by fun. Towards the end, there's a touching tribute to Taylor Hawkins with a cover of Foo Fighters' *Learn To Fly*, followed by Momsen-less periods as her bandmates take the spotlight with thrilling albeit excessive guitar and drum solos. The Pretty Reckless might be steeped in the era of drugs, sex, and rock'n'roll, but they're not beholden to it, and Taylor's rare charisma makes tonight both a resounding victory, and one that's fully on their own terms.

LIZ SCARLETT

CONJURER

TUSKAR / SUGAR HORSE

THE DOME, LONDON

Rugby's fast-rising ruffians helm a three-pronged brutal assault

IT'S A SUREFIRE contender for the loudest tour of the year that takes over The Dome for the final show of this run. For the few who get down early, SUGAR HORSE decimate eardrums without mercy as a screech of feedback and crushing hardcore-flecked doom erupts from the stage. They contrast it with atmospheric passages that ebb and flow, but there's the ever-looming threat of sonic annihilation, and it's frankly criminal there's so few people here for them. Where Sugar Horse stretch themselves across genres, TUSKAR are all monolithic sludge that rumbles and seethes, cascading forth at a level a mere two people simply shouldn't be capable of. Beckoning the growing crowd closer, they launch into a pummelling assault on the eardrums. Drummer/vocalist Tyler Hodges batters both his kit and his vocal cords – a magnetic force at once a whirlwind of limbs and barrel-chested bellows.

It'd be a tall order for most bands to follow these two intense spectacles. But then, most bands aren't CONJURER. With just two albums under their belt, they have the metal world in a choke-

hold and tonight is yet more proof of how they earned such lofty acclaim in a relatively short time.

It Dwells and *Rot* form the opening salvo, their tar-thick atmosphere suffocating while those riffs (oh, those riffs) pulverise necks. Even at the end of a tour, they're a force to be reckoned with, one that the swollen crowd welcomes uproariously. There's simply no mistaking Dan Nightingale's imperious roar, with both *Choke* and *Hollow* from their debut *Mire* sounding particularly crushing and the former opening the first pit of the night.

Dan's bellowing across the room without a mic for *Hollow* remains as impressive as ever, and the band delve into EP *I* for a scathing rendition of *Scorn*. The set culminates with *Hadal*, with bassist Conor Marshall entering the pit for the building-levelling bass-drop. It might be a known quantity, but it never gets old, and the band look like they're having a blast every time. Judging by the flying drinks, beer-coated floor and sweaty punters, so is everyone else.

WILL MARSHALL

Sepultura: Andreas Kisser suffers the metal quiff that turned



SEPULTURA

SACRED REICH / CROWBAR

ELECTRIC BRIXTON, LONDON

Brazil's metal standard-bearers retrace their wild, wide-ranging journey

TONIGHT, CROWBAR DELIVER precisely what's expected of them, which is Sabbathian sludge, NOLA-patented grooves and Kirk Windstein's howl at the molten core of it all. There's a palpable gratitude in the air as they pummel their way through their set, and this euphoric feeling continues throughout each subsequent performance. In a world assailed from all sides by environmental doom, disease (Covid ain't been conquered yet, lest we forget) and political tomfoolery, thank fuck that at least we can get together again and worship at the altar of The Riff. **SACRED REICH** might be the cuddliest thrash metal outfit in history. Their set, covering the band's entire career from 1987's *Ignorance* to 2019's *Awakening*, is notable not only for the impeccable chug of its mosh-ready riffs, but also for vocalist/bassist Phil Rind's

heartfelt stage patter, which mirrors the progressive inclinations of his lyrics. Sacred Reich are a "woke mob" for sure – and proud of it.

SEPULTURA take the stage to the punkish strains of *Polícia* by fellow Brazilians Titãs and soon the wormlike synthesiser intro to *Isolation* oozes out over the crowd. Hearing newer tracks like this and *Machine Messiah* played alongside classics such as *Arise* and *Refuse/Resist* makes it clear how far Sepultura have come as a creative unit. The oldies sound as powerful as ever, but there's a sophistication and complexity to the more recent material that denotes a band reluctant to rest on their reputation.

The recruitment of drummer Eloy Casagrande in 2011 elevated Sepultura from cherished legacy act to the progressive metal juggernaut that unleashed 2013's *The Mediator Between*

Head And Hands Must Be The Heart, 2017's *Machine Messiah* and 2020's *Quadra*, and it's the relentlessly energetic, octopoid skinbasher who commands the lion's share of attention in a live setting. Derrick Green has fronted the band for so long now that it might be easy to take him for granted, were it not for his inarguable charisma, unifying stage presence and an expressive roar that has lost none of its potency in the 24 years since he first came aboard. Bassist Paulo Jr and guitarist Andreas Kisser, meanwhile, are the twin pillars of the band, shouldering a legacy stretching back to the mid-80s with serenity and good humour. The set ends with a thunderous double whammy of *Ratamahatta* and *Roots Bloody Roots*, which leaves only one question: when can we do this again?

JOSEPH STANNARD

Zeal & Ardor: Manuel Gagneux stokes up the Bristol crowd

ZEAL & ARDOR

HERIOT

TRINITY CENTRE, BRISTOL

Switzerland's Luciferian trailblazer sets the West County alight

BRITISH UP'N'COMERS HERIOT

provide the rebel-rousing ahead of tonight's main draw. Chaotically blending noise, hardcore and sludge is a fine art, but tonight something is clearly off. The sludge and noise elements capture a potent abysmal vibe, but at times they sound like each member is playing in a separate band. Debbie Gough's screeches are drowned in an excessive amount of reverb, and the tempest they've become renowned for fails to fully cohere. They will have better nights than this.

Bristol's Trinity Centre – a Grade II Listed former church – is a fitting backdrop for both **ZEAL & ARDOR**'s signature combination of slave spirituals meets black metal hymns and their use of iconic Luciferian sigils. Even more aptly, they open with the powerfully melodic *Church Burns* from their latest, self-titled album. The venue is packed with an eclectic mix of fans, some sporting extreme metal t-shirts, others looking more like indie kids. But that's the beauty of Zeal & Ardor's unique bluesy mix of genres, and their appeal is wide. The band is a little sparse tonight, however, with the two backing singers missing from the stage – “They're sick, but not in a funny way, in a fucked-up way,” quips frontman Manuel Gagneux, who encourages fans to sing along in an effort to replace them. The band have decided that rather than cancelling the

show, they'll forge ahead without – and their stage presence is so huge, you can hardly tell they're two people down.

Manuel preaches to the crowd between songs, taking much-needed breathers from his energetic performance, jumping between two mics for his blackened growls and clean singing. The band blast through a good portion of the new album, from the rage-fuelled *Götterdämmerung* to the soulful *Run* and *Feed The Machine*, while *Devil Is Fine*'s sorrow-stained, inverted gospel leaves everyone transfixed. The crowd convulses once more as the night culminates in the encore's unholy trio of *J-M-B*, *I Caught You* and *Baphomet*. “Hail fuckin' Satan,” Manuel preaches before he leaves the stage, as his congregation still buzzes in awe.

ALICE PATTILO



Heriot brew up a rare, imperfect storm

CAVE IN STAKE

HEAVEN, LONDON

STAKE are an apt support tonight, seeing as there's something psychedelic squirming under those weighty riffs, waiting to break free. In the Belgians' case, though, it's not entirely benign, more like some acid reflux being brewed. So it's a shame that the clogged PA only hints at their tempestuous scope on record. No such problems for **CAVE IN**, of course, and the warmly rapturous response they get from a packed crowd as they come on and launch into *New Reality* is the mark of a band for whom everyone here has a deep bond. The band's re-emergence, and the search for hope after the death of bassist Caleb Scofield in 2018, is written into every note of their music, the songs from new album *Heavy Pendulum* weaving the most luminous of breaks from those elemental riffs. *Blood Spiller*'s tectonic grooves are riven with Stephen Brodsky's glistening guitar lines, and it's no surprise that they're so locked in as a unit that it becomes almost transcendental. Nate Newton's a charismatic new anchor, he and Stephen trading visceral and exploratory vocals before *Wavering Angel*'s untethered folk-tinged lament rends hearts and encore-opening classic *Big Riff* sends them soaring once more.

JONATHAN SELZER

SHOW ME THE BODY

POWERPLANT / WU-LU / ISLAND OF LOVE
THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

Showcasing the overlap between hardcore and softer rock, **ISLAND OF LOVE** open tonight's sold-out show with their summery, easygoing shoegaze-tinged indie. **WU-LU** follow in that softer vein. Their shimmering shoegaze and skittering breakbeats occasionally delve into reverb-soaked hip hop, making waves of sound that enthrall the crowd. **POWERPLANT** round out the opening trio with tried'n'tested punk. The quartet barrel through a raucous set, though the energy isn't fully reciprocated. The band's enthusiasm is there, but the dearth of originality, especially on such an eclectic bill, does them no favours. Neither does the bassline that sounds suspiciously like Postman Pat's theme tune. The Underworld is up to its usual sweaty temperatures by the time **SHOW ME THE BODY** take the stage. A screech of feedback is all it takes for the tightly wound crowd to lose it, the pit heaving as soon as the New Yorkers get started. The juddering electronics sit uneasily alongside their off-kilter hardcore, creating a threatening and claustrophobic atmosphere. It's an abrasive, ugly and utterly compelling set from one of hardcore's weirdest, most experimental bands.

WILL MARSHALL

Gaahls Wyrd: stark, staring, brilliant

GAAHLS WYRD

SAOR / GAEREA

THE GARAGE, LONDON

Extreme metal's enigmatic icon draws from three decades of dark power

STARTING THEIR SET while a huge queue is still stuck outside, Portuguese dark magicians **GAEREA** attack the stage like the headliners they're destined to be. Clad in black, sigil-bearing masks, they ply an eerie trade that is as much post-metal as it is black. With a set heavily drawn from this year's excellent *Mirage* LP, the likes of *Salve* and *Deluge* are enthralling rides through a nihilistic world with a nasty edge of paranoia – in a good way. Closing with the epic *Laude*, the quartet make a huge impression. Gaerea are a stunning noise and equally powerful live presence; it's safe to say we can expect to hear a lot more of them soon.

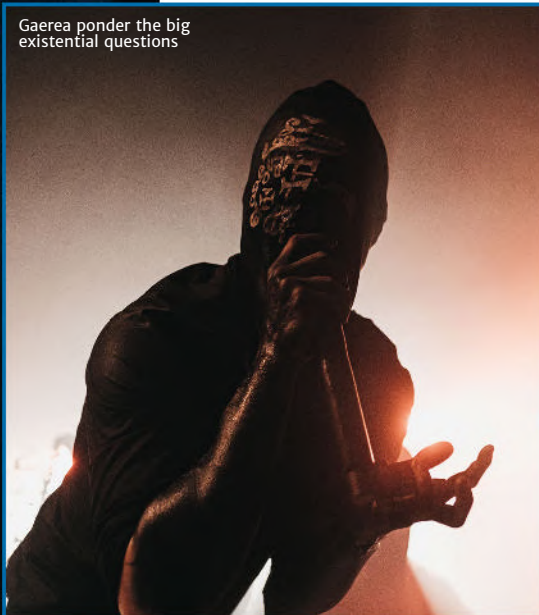
SAOR, by comparison, are somewhat more prosaic. Eschewing the visuals and with a less downbeat sound, there isn't quite the same sense of all-encompassing darkness. Owing more to mid-90s folk and gothic death metal than black, they are tight and have real ability, but they're maybe a little too jolly for the proceedings to really hit home tonight. That's not to say they wouldn't go down a storm at all manner of pagan folk metal-type affairs.

Painter, actor, wine connoisseur, fashion designer – Gaahl is black metal's renaissance man: a controversial figure who's trodden his own individualist path with a sense of humour drier than a pint of toasted sand. **GAAHLS WYRD** sees him both looking forward – set opener *Ghosts Invited* is a gloriously dark slab of baritone goth – and celebrating three decades at the forefront of Norwegian black metal. It's a set that draws from Gorgoroth, Trelldom and God Seed as well as 2019's excellent full-length *GastiR – Ghosts Invited*. Not that it's all about the man himself; the band are all seasoned veterans with CVs to make a wooden church nervous.

There is a real sense of power emanating from the stage, backing up Gaahl's utterly domineering presence. Prowling the stage like a monochrome lion, there's always that hint of real menace about him. Black metal at its heart was and is supposed to sound evil, and they make a strong showing of sonic devilry. He once joked his religion was Gaahlism, and he appears to be making plenty of converts. He's not the messiah, but at this rate he may well add it to his CV.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

Gaerea ponder the big existential questions



Nova Twins fully justify all the buzz

NOVA TWINS

ELECTRIC BRIXTON, LONDON

South London's punk rock firebrands have a blast in Brixton

IT'S FAIR TO say that grime-punk rockers Nova Twins have had something of a whirlwind year, and it's not slowing down any time soon. With yet another award nomination under their belts as of yesterday in the newly created (but long overdue) Best Alternative Music Act category at the MOBOs – which they themselves passionately campaigned for – the pair are evidently still riding that high when they bounce onto the stage at Electric and launch into *Fire & Ice* from their stellar latest release, *Supernova*.

Selling out a headline show on their home turf is unmistakably a huge moment for childhood friends Amy Love and Georgia South, and they do everything they can to match the fervour of the Brixton crowd to show their appreciation. The love they have for their ardent fans is such that partway through *Cleopatra* – only the second song of the night – they've already clambered over the barriers to perform in the pit like they're in a dive bar. Though they're now surrounded by pyrotechnics and a giant strobing backdrop onstage, moments like these, their magnetic presence and high energy, ensures that they remain the focal point throughout.

Alone onstage apart from a drummer, it's a testament to their virtuosic talent

that they can make such a huge sound armed only with their instruments and a couple of formidably large pedal boards. Bassist Georgia never stops jumping as she seamlessly multitasks, going back and forth between her pedals and an effects ring on her hand that creates a satisfyingly chunky 'wob-wob-wob' during the ferocious *Antagonist*. Meanwhile, singer and guitarist Amy is a forceful and charismatic presence that you can't take your eyes off. She commands the stage while wielding her axe, headbanging, jumping and dancing – which she encourages the audience to partake in as well, acknowledging the 90s R'n'B influence of tracks such as the sex-positive *Puzzles* and revenge anthem *K.M.B.*, a song that, when she asks the audience if they're heartbroken, prompts Georgia to raise her hand with a self-effacing laugh.

Concluding their triumphant set with the electrifying *Choose Your Fighter*, the pair remain onstage to play a new track over the speakers. Unexpectedly, it's a remix of Sam Smith's *Unholy*, which goes down an absolute storm, lending the end of the gig a cosy, afterparty vibe, and giving further evidence of Nova Twins' genius.

CATHERINE MORRIS

FOZZY ESCAPE THE FATE

02 ACADEMY, BRISTOL

An inability to hold a tune has seldom been a critical hindrance in metal, as is ably demonstrated by both the headliners and **ESCAPE THE FATE**. Even the support's biggest tunes, *This War Is Ours* and *One For The Money*, sound inexorably flat, yet with enough zest and onstage acrobatics the set ends on a celebratory high. Managing to wring every decibel from the Academy's ropey PA and rolling out as many live clichés as possible certainly helps **FOZZY**'s cause. New drummer Grant Brooks is an entertaining sight behind his minimal kit, while Rich Ward and Billy Grey gleefully pull out every pose and facial expression from the 'Rock Guitar For Dummies' manual. Three decades of experience in the ring and two onstage have increasingly blurred the lines between Chris Jericho the character and the person in this environment. Whether he's enjoying himself or believes his own hysteria is difficult to ascertain, but his charisma elevates the lumpen meat'n'potatoes of *Do You Want To Start A War* and *Spider In My Mouth*. And not even his acrimonious voice giving up can lessen the impact of the undisputable earworm that is *Judas* teeing up a final AC/DC cover.

ADAM BRENNAN

H09909

BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB, LEEDS

H09909 are known for their bludgeoning live shows and released a killer record this year, so it's disappointing that Brudenell Social Club isn't packed to the gills tonight. Even so, sizeable pits break out from the moment the OGM and Yeti Bones explode into volatile opener *Christopher Dörner*, hollering and violently belching over menacing hip hop, Bad Brains-esque guitars and ravaged Death Grips beats. Their confrontational second record, *Skin*, saw them call in the A-list guns to push the boundaries of their abrasive punk – Blink 182's Travis Barker produced, while Corey Taylor dropped by to collab – but H09909's live show feels pointedly low-key. Backed by just a drummer, with a simple backdrop and no light show, the OGM sets off anarchic backing tracks and samples, at one point spewing gravel-throated raps in complete darkness with a flashlight hanging off his forehead, while Yeti Bones raps into a telephone handset, writhing like his soul is being exorcised during a sordid rendition of NIN's *March Of The Pigs* and a rabid *Knuckle Up*. "Can I join ya'll?" Yeti Bones asks, before diving into the crowd for an untamed *Bite My Face*. This is where H09909 work best: up close, deep in the bowels, unified by chaos.

DANNII LEIVERS

Suicide Silence: Eddie Hermida wants to give a (w)hole lotta love



AFTER THE BURIAL / SUICIDE SILENCE

CURRENTS

THE MILL, BIRMINGHAM

US co-headlining scene-setters reaffirm their core values

FIFTEEN YEARS SINCE its inception, the Impericon Never Say Die! Tour is still a veritable proving ground for -core suffix bands, retaining a sense of tantalising possibility, even if no one has come close to the arena-conquering heights of Parkway Drive and Architects. **CURRENTS** are proof that the influence of Bring Me The Horizon's *Sempiternal* stretches beyond UK shores. Their mix of pop-inflected choruses, vicious beatdowns and ambient melody is delivered with hyperactive zeal as frontman Brian Wille bounces across the stage like he's spring-operated. Where the band fall down is a lack of standout anthems. *Flag To Wave* and *Better Days* hit the right emotional notes, but don't have the call-and-response magic to take them to another level.

When **SUICIDE SILENCE** last played the UK, it was to massively diminished

crowds after their 2017 self-titled album was soundly trashed by fans and press alike. But absence really must make the heart grow fonder, and their arrival onstage is met with a sense of ecstasy. Older tunes are greeted like all-time classics, the crowd singing along to *Wake Up*, *Fuck Everything* and *You Only Live Once* with as much gusto as they did the *Bohemian Rhapsody* intro tape, while newer tunes *Capable Of Violence* and *You Must Die* deliver hooks that could raise the Titanic. Their biggest weapon is Eddie Hermida; a potent vocal talent already, he brings a showmanship and personality that really helps the band feel like masters of the comeback.

AFTER THE BURIAL would have had a tough time following such an incendiary set regardless, but something going awry on opening song *In Flux* (twice) really doesn't help



After The Burial perform their visitation rites

matters. Credit to vocalist Anthony Notarmaso, however, as he fills the time with anecdotes and an onstage Q&A while things get fixed. Third time proves to be the charm as the band set off into a searing *Collapse*, their dexterous djent-adjacent sound inciting a buzzing mass of activity like someone kicked a hornets' nest and then taught them kung fu. Like a more -core Meshuggah, ATB carpet-bomb the senses with brutality and technical virtuosity, keeping just enough anthemic energy to incite massive roar-alongs on *Exit*, *Exist* and *Lost In The Static*, Anthony's engaging speech – "There is no stigma with being not OK, there is no stigma with getting help" – cementing the feeling that Never Say Die! is more a community gathering rather than just another stacked-bill tour.

RICH HOBSON



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You've said before that Nightwish's music was meant to be downbeat and acoustic, but your voice pushed them into a more metal direction. Would you have been miserable if they had remained a folk band?

"That's difficult because, at that time, I really wanted to be an operatic singer and that was the only voice I had. I wasn't able to do much with it beyond full-on power, so it didn't fit nicely with the acoustic music we started with."

You were one of the first female lead singers in that more symphonic end of power metal. Who's the most famous person that's come up to you and called you an influence?

"Simone Simons [lead singer of Epica]. She was just like, [starts bowing]. Ha ha ha! It's funny, I've just come home from a tour and one of the girls in one of the support bands was singing backstage. My musicians turned to me and said, 'This is completely your fault, Tarja.' Ha ha!"

This year marks 25 years since the first Nightwish album, *Angels Fall First*. What do you think of that album now?

"I am looking at the gold record hanging on the wall right now. It was kind of a second demo for us. When we were making it, we had no idea that it would become a complete album or bring us a record deal. It was very exciting. We were so young that, when I listen to myself, it's unbearable. Ha ha ha! But, hey, everybody needs to start somewhere."

Nightwish fired you using an open letter that was publicly shared. What's your relationship with them 17 years later?

"The only guy that I had contact with was Marko [Hietala, bass], but he's no longer in the band. I even sang with him some years ago. The rest, it's been emailing. Everything is fine but we're not in touch. That all died a long time ago. I wrote Tuomas [Holopainen, Nightwish band leader] a message when his father passed, so we're fine."

"MY STROKE WAS CAUSED BY STRESS"

FIVE MINUTES WITH

TARJA TURUNEN

Symphonic metal's original queen reflects on Nightwish, recovering from illness, and why she's making a fresh start

WORDS: MATT MILLS



Do you want more of a relationship with them, or are you happy with how things are?

"I'm happy. I don't have any regrets. I hope they're happy."

You're releasing a new retrospective of your solo career called *Living The Dream*. Why is now the time for a best-of album?

"It took catastrophically long to come up with this record because we had the Covid pandemic; I'm still doing those tours that have been postponed since 2020. I feel like this is a good time because *In The Raw*, my last album, was my most personal. It came from the shock of my stroke [in 2018] and the struggles with my health. Now, I can release this and start again. It can be the platform for a new album and new start."

How are you feeling nowadays?

"I'm very good, thank you. Probably in a better condition than ever, physically. The stroke was caused by stress. I'm an artist, not the boss, so when my husband [who's also Tarja's manager] stayed home [and I went on tour], I needed to handle things I was not ready to face. When there was a problem, people came to me."

Why did he stay home?

"Our daughter had been touring with me since she was a baby and, when she turned four, we wanted her to go to school. I had to leave [to go on tour] and closing that door was a bitch. That was the hardest thing to do."

How did you recover?

"I got a mentor. I had talks with a very old Argentinian man that were a sort of therapy. He just made me realise that I need positive people around me, so that my artistic wings can spread wide open and I can be happy."

What can you tell us about that new album you mentioned?

"I'm currently writing songs for it, but I can already say to you that it's pretty heavy. It's because of my live band. They are absolutely amazing musicians and, when they play, it's a massive support for me and my big voice. They lift me up with their energy, so this is going to be really powerful, with metal guitars and grooving bass and drums." 

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Parlophone

The background of the advertisement features a stack of Marshall guitar amplifiers. The top amplifier is a JCM 900, with its control panel visible, showing knobs for Middle, Treble, Master, and Pre-Amp. Below it is another Marshall amplifier with the brand name prominently displayed in white script. To the right, a black hoodie with the Marshall logo in gold script is hanging. The overall aesthetic is dark and iconic, representing the Marshall brand.

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